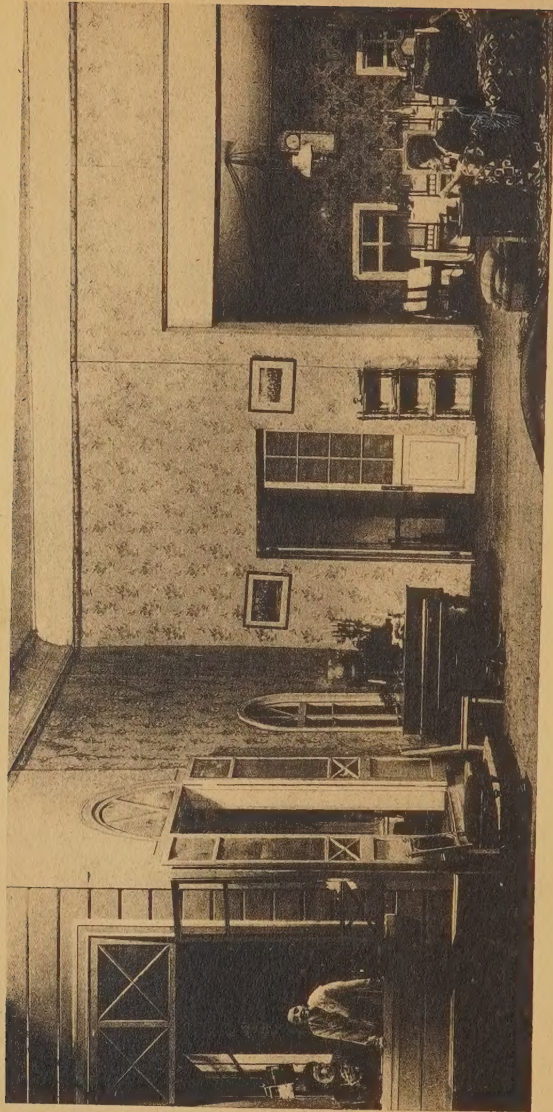


THE PATH OF THE MODERN
RUSSIAN STAGE



A. Chekhov's "THREE SISTERS" (ACT I.) on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre.

The Path of the Modern
RUSSIAN STAGE
AND OTHER ESSAYS

By
ALEXANDER BAKSHY

With Twelve Photo Illustrations

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PREFACE

I WISH to record my sincere gratitude to my friends, Mr A. B. Clinkscales, Mr Paul Selver, and Mr Lancelot Lawton, who on various occasions have lent me their invaluable assistance in keeping in check what to me has proved a source of perpetual annoyance—my “pronounced Russian accent.”

My thanks are also due to Mr Rothay Reynolds and Messrs Mills & Boon for permission to reproduce a photograph of Mme. Kommissarzhevsky, and to the Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies for a favour courteously rendered.

A. B.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	V
INTRODUCTION	xi
THE PATH OF THE MODERN RUSSIAN STAGE—	
CHAP.	
I. Historical Review	3
II. The Moscow Art Theatre	23
III. The Moscow Art Theatre (<i>continued</i>)	38
IV. Kommissarzhevsky and Meyerhold	54
V. Meyerhold (<i>continued</i>)	67
VI. Evereĭnov, Fokin, and Benois	77
VII. Conclusion	89
VIACHESLAV IVANOV—A POET PHILOSOPHER OF MODERN RUSSIA	
	99
LIVING SPACE AND THE THEATRE—	
I. Consulting the Cyclops and the Elephant on Problems of Art	123
II. The Spectator Sitting in Judgment	141
III. Table of Forms of the Theatre	196
A NOTE ON MR GORDON CRAIG'S THEORIES	
	199
THE KINEMATOGRAPH AS ART	
	207
INDEX	
	241

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I. A. Chekhov's "THREE SISTERS" (Act I.) on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theatre (1)	<i>frontispiece</i>
II. A Scene in "UNCLE VANIA" by A. Chekhov, produced at the Moscow Art Theatre (1)	17
III. The Moscow Art Theatre's staging of "THE CHERRY ORCHARD" by A. Chekhov (1)	25
IV. Characters from "THE BLUE BIRD" by M. Maeterlinck—(1) "SUGAR"; (2) "TIME"; (3) "BREAD"; the production on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theatre	33
V. VERA KOMMISSARZHEVSKY in "SISTER BEATRICE" by M. Maeterlinck, as produced by V. Meyerhold	49
VI. Sketch by N. Sapunov for Alexander Blok's "LITTLE BOOTH," produced by V. Meyerhold at the Theatre of V. Kommissarzhevsky (2)	65
VII. "ST PATRICK'S PURGATORY" on the Stage of the Old-Time Theatre, from an architectural design by V. Shchuko (3)	81

	PAGE
VIII. THE THEATRE AT ATHENS . . .	129
IX. A Typical Shakespearian Stage. [Re- construction by V. E. ALBRIGHT] ⁽⁴⁾	145
X. A. Chekhov's "THREE SISTERS" (Act III.) on the Stage of the Moscow Art Theatre ⁽¹⁾	161
XI. "THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL" by <i>Nicholas Gogol</i> , as produced at the Moscow Art Theatre ⁽⁵⁾	177
XII. An Italian Perspective Scenery of the Seventeenth Century ⁽⁶⁾	193

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(5) MOSKOVSKY KHUDOZHESTVENNY TEATR. *Izdanië zhurnala "Rampa i Zhizn."*

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INTRODUCTION

THE modern developments of the stage have been so complex and so intimately connected with the actual conditions of theatre-work that nothing but scholarly research or practical knowledge of the stage would seem to justify an author in venturing before the public with his own ideas on the subject. Yet neither of these requirements have I been able to fulfil. I have carried out no independent historical research, nor have I ever worked in the theatre, which facts, perhaps, will hardly need pointing out to competent readers. If, however, in spite of these admissions, I have the courage of laying down my views on problems that engage the minds of so many serious and thoroughly competent workers, I do so only in the belief that the ideas I set forth throw new light on vital aspects of the theatre.

It is not for me to say whether or not my conviction in this respect is fully warranted. All I can advance in its justification is that I have applied to the problem of the theatre the principles which I have formed in studying art in general, and which, to my knowledge, have never been adequately stated. Perhaps, I may go further, and say that these principles rest on certain philosophical conceptions, though I am aware that by making this statement I lay myself open to the grave charge of "intellectualism," the deadliest sin that the modern artist can conceive of. In order to allay the suspicions of such purists, it is necessary to explain with all promptitude that at the root of my theorizing lies the belief that the *sense* of individuality, *i.e.* the *perception* of continuity and discontinuity, is the primary factor which determines our attitude towards the work of art, and, consequently, as I maintain, the very *form* which this work assumes.

This is not the place to enlarge upon the

philosophical significance of the principle of individuality, as I personally conceive it. Those of its aspects which come nearest to the problem of the theatre, are broadly indicated in the essay on Viacheslav Ivanov. In the other essays of this volume I endeavour to disclose the bearing of this principle on the experience of spatial forms, and to trace its influence throughout the evolution of the theatre.

It will be noticed that I examine the problem from the standpoint of the spectator, and persistently lay stress on the effect which the attitude of the spectator produces on the form of art. This may appear a truism needing no special emphasis for those who hold that art is entirely a subjective phenomenon. But, for my own part, I do not share that theory, and my insistence on the *rôle* of the spectator has a different meaning and proceeds from different reasons. Only a few points, however, in this most involved problem need be stated here.

The spectator not merely experiences

certain excitations which the work of art may cause in him. He may be impressed by its beauty or even ugliness, and yet remain unconscious of its artistic nature. It is only when he projects his sensations and invests them with a reality that is independent of, and distinct from himself, that the work he observes earns its title to be regarded as "art." It follows that the phenomenon of art arises neither in the work itself, nor in the spectator, but just between them, in that line of contact and division, which is established by their reaction the one upon the other. Stated in other words, this means that a detached observation of an object asserts its reality for the spectator, or, *what is the same*, brings out its *form* as an entity complete in itself. But it is obvious that the object viewed must possess certain properties that would enable it to assert itself against the spectator, and here the distinction between a work of art and an ordinary object is made manifest in the greater power with which the former realizes its particular "self" in

the medium selected. Two conclusions can be drawn from these definitions. First, that what is termed an art work is only of relative nature, differing from other objects solely in degree and not in substance. And second, that the usual opposition of " form " and " subject " has no meaning in art, since a " subject " can reach our artistic consciousness only inasmuch as it assumes a definite form. It is the subject, for instance, that impresses us in the geometrical drawing of a garden in Egyptian frescoes. But in what way does it reveal itself to our mind? It does so in the peculiar composition of the drawing, which stands before us as an independent spatial entity expressing a definite attitude of mind on the part of the artist.

Since the *form* of a work of art is determined by the interaction between the work itself and the spectator, it is futile to look for specific forms of artistic expression, unless both the medium used and the changing attitudes of the spectator are studied in their mutual relationship. In the case

of visual arts this line of contact and division must of necessity realize itself in space, asserting itself with the greater power, the more sensitive is the beholder to spatial forms.

If we now inquire into the nature of our perception of space, we shall find it composed of two elements—extension and colour. Both these elements contribute to the effect of *form* as perceived by the spectator, but the power of asserting their boundaries against the latter is far more effective in extension than it is in colour. Line, surface and volume make us instantly conscious of our position towards an object as an independent entity. Not so with colour. Normally, colour merely fills the boundaries marked by extension, indicating the presence of some matter. It is only when it ceases to be neutral and makes a direct appeal to the eye by some peculiar quality (intensity, combination, etc.) that it establishes itself as a *form*. In this case, it is interesting to note, colour itself partakes of the nature of extension, and we feel it

then as something tangible and materialized in space. For that reason one would be justified in saying that in visual arts the perception of extension is the primary factor that determines the *form*, or individual identity of a work.

These brief remarks indicate the standpoint from which I approach the problem of the theatre. As I see it, it is mainly a problem of the relationship between the stage and the auditorium, expressed in terms of space. Moreover, I firmly believe that the history of theatrical forms fully bears out the importance which I attach to this relationship. Throughout the ages of theatre-development, the position of the spectator with regard to the play produced, has been the chief factor in fashioning the *form* of dramatic performance. As this position was itself a resultant of two forces—one coming from the spectator, and the other from the performance—the *form* created also assumed two faces, one turned to the audience, and the other to the stage. As seen by the

spectator, theatre-performances have resolved themselves into a series of visual impressions varying in the *degree of spatial discontinuity* and, consequently, in the degree of opposition between the world portrayed (in its completeness, or separate parts) and his own individuality. Regarded from the point of view of the stage, performances have ranged themselves according to the manner in which the medium of the theatre, as such, was treated, assuming *presentational* character when the peculiar nature of the medium was frankly admitted, and *representational* character when the object was to conceal that nature and create an illusion of an entirely different world. But as visual effects form the chief means of the art of the theatre, both these methods—presentation and representation—had to be realized in terms of space and were, thereby, of necessity, translated into the spatial forms of continuity and discontinuity.

It is *a priori* evident that the combinations arising out of the interaction of the

two moments just described must be complex and manifold. To analyse them all would take me far beyond the task I have set out to fulfil in the present volume. So that I have confined myself to indicating the main forms of the theatre, illustrating them with examples taken from the Russian, English and Greek theatres, of the actual construction and working of which I have a wider knowledge than of the theatres of other countries.

In my examination I have pursued the method of construing up the position of the spectator and determining the nature of the dramatic effect produced in each particular case. I will readily admit that the results I have thus obtained, are often conjectural and open to the charge of being interpreted in a too subjective manner. But though in some cases my conclusions may be lacking in complete justification, this fact does not destroy my conviction that the method adopted in this study, provides a signal means of comprehending the nature of the theatre and

of gaining insight into the inner structure of the phenomena which have hitherto appeared as devoid of form and as defying analysis.

However this may be, it would be hard to expect that my views will meet with immediate and universal acceptance. I can foresee innumerable objections. But I will deal only with one of them here, for it has a direct bearing on the subject of my essay, "The Path of the Modern Russian Stage."

Since the memorable visits of Russian ballet and opera to this country, the main achievement of the Russian stage has been associated in the public mind with the striking pictorial effects which the Russian artists introduced in the methods of setting. The reader may, therefore, be justly surprised at finding that the present volume contains but scanty reference to the work of those artists and the problems attaching to the scenic use of pictorial element. It will, probably, be argued that this gap is due to the natural limitations of my method

which, it would seem, leaves outside its scope the scenic significance of colour. This conclusion, however, will not be justified. Far from ignoring the importance of colour, I believe that the theatre will ever extend the use of colour-effects, developing them along the lines suggested by such students of mobile colour as Mr Rimington and the late Scriabin. But this circumstance will never be able to alter the fact that as a power fashioning the *form* of a theatrical performance, colour will always remain subordinate to extension, serving only to qualify the relationship between the stage and the spectator by giving form to secondary characteristics of the play, such as style, character, etc. It is significant that the domination of the painter on the Russian stage started with the first attempts at "stylisation" initiated by Meyerhold with his flat, decorative scenery. The sway of colour in ballet and opera has been due to the same striving after style in representation, and now that the idea of presentation, accord-

ing to the specific nature of each medium used, is gaining an ever increasing popularity in drama, opera, and ballet, we see the purely pictorial element gradually brought down to its legitimate but quite subordinate position. But despite the pictorial rule of the last ten years, the main line of development of the Russian stage has never swerved from the fundamental problem of *form*, in the attempted solutions of which the Russian theatre has scored its most conspicuous and most endurable triumphs. For such reasons, I thought it unnecessary to dwell in this volume on the scenic work of Russian artists, reserving it for an account of modern Russian painting, where, in all propriety, it should be treated.

To speak of art aspects of the kinematograph may appear ludicrous in the eyes of the modern artist, but I make no apology for including here an essay on this subject. The time is not far off when only the blind will fail to see the immense artistic possibilities of this much abused mechanical device. Meanwhile, I am glad to note that

during the last three years which have elapsed since my essay was written, the progress made has completely vindicated the principles which I then laid down as the condition of artistic development of the kinematograph. Thus, we have had ballets and pantomimes (Reinhardt's "Miracle," for instance) "featured" on the film, whilst in Moscow, I have heard, a school of kinema-acting has been established in which actors are taught dramatic expression and rhythmic movement according to Delsarte and Dalcroze! It is true, so far even the best productions have shown little appreciation of the real nature of the medium, but the efforts made are in the right direction and encourage the hope that greater successes will soon follow.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL REVIEW

THE English public has been watching these last few years the display of wonderful theatrical wares which the Russian dancers and singers have chosen to bring over to this country. The spectacle has been a startling revelation of the wealth of artistic treasures possessed by Russia—that land of snow, and vodka, and down-trodden “moujicks.” Moreover, the wares themselves have been dazzling with colours that seemed to outshine everything of the kind produced at home. The ballet, with its feast of gorgeous scenery and rapturous dancing, first introduced the modern Russian stage to this country, and the English public quickly abandoned itself

to its Baksts, its Fokins, its Pavlovas, and its Karsavinas. Next the opera came, and the melodies of Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin, and Chaliapin's remarkable impersonations captured another corner in the public mind. The last season of the Russian opera and ballet at Drury Lane provided the latest wonder: a cross, as it were, between ballet and opera which resulted in the bewildering production of "Le Coq d'Or." Lastly, but for the unfortunate events which since August 1914 have set the world aflame, the English public would have been given an opportunity of seeing the performances of that renowned company of actors—the Moscow Art Theatre. This, however, was not to be. So, until better times, the relations which began to grow between the Russian and the English stages are arrested in their development, and the public of this country is left to its own ingenuity to piece together whatever scattered impressions of the Russian theatre it may have been able to form.

While admiring Russian productions, the public seems to be completely in the dark as to their mutual interdependence, their inner significance and the bearing they have on the development of the theatre. Taken separately, as isolated phenomena, the Russian productions that have passed before the eyes of the London audiences, have betrayed no signs of their origin : of the history of the various movements in Russia appertaining to the theatre, their victories and their defeats, and the great research and experimental work of which these productions have been the crowning achievement. It is my object in this essay to help to fill in the design that will show the main lines of progress and the forces at work in determining their direction.

It is a curious fact that the Russian theatre which now, doubtless, stands in the very first rank of contemporary national theatres, is barely two hundred and fifty years old. At the time when England had already passed her zenith in the history

of her theatre, Russia could boast only of a not too numerous class of jesters and jugglers, of miracle-plays which were few in number and most crudely primitive in execution, and of the school theatres at Kiev, which were mere faint echoes of Polish and Latin influences.

The proper stage appeared in Russia for the first time only in the reign of Alexis Mikhailovich. Foreign influences were slowly spreading all over the country, undermining the old customs and creating new demands. The Tsar himself, after a period of pious life accompanied by prohibitions of every kind of popular amusement, gradually yielded to the natural appeal of worldly distractions and decided to have a theatre at his court. No Russian actors being available, the actors had to be obtained from abroad, and we have it recorded that in 1660 Tsar Alexis personally instructed an Englishman, Hebdon, to get for him in foreign lands, to use his own words, "carvers on wood and stone, glass makers and masters of acting comedy."

This attempt, as well as another made twelve years later, proved a failure. In the latter case the Tsar's men at first succeeded in securing the services of Velten, the famous actor of the time, and Anna Poulsen, the prima-donna of the Copenhagen theatre. But the enquiries made by these actors of their friends in Russia, as to what life was like in that country, revealed a state of things that was not altogether inviting. They were informed that foreigners, if their services were valued by the authorities, were never allowed to leave Muscovy, and if found guilty of some offence, or if they incurred the displeasure of the powers that be, were in danger of being knouted or sent to Siberia. Naturally, the over-fastidious foreign actors refused the honour of entertaining the Tsar. Fortunately for the latter, as well as for the future of the Russian theatre, there happened to live in Moscow at that time a German pastor, one Gregori, who volunteered to assist the Tsar in creating a theatre. The coveted wish was thus soon realized, and on October 17th,

1672, the first recorded performance in Russia was given before the Tsar and his court in a specially built wooden hall. Other productions followed, and the theatre flourished for four years, until the death of Tsar Alexis and the subsequent disturbances in the life of the court put an end to this interesting venture.

As regards Gregori's repertoire it is remarkable that his plays were mostly borrowed from the popular repertoire of the German theatre of the generation preceding his own, which, as is well known, assimilated the plays and the methods of the early English comedians. Thus the "pickleherring," the familiar comic figure of the mediæval English theatre, advancing via the German stage, found himself eventually installed on the boards of the newly-born Russian theatre. Another echo of the English drama we find in the production of *Tamburlaine*—a remote offspring of Marlowe's famous tragedy. In addition to foreign plays a few plays on Biblical subjects, written by Russian writers, were

also produced, but, needless to say, they were mere imitations of the established type.

After a period of suspense following upon the death of Tsar Alexis the theatre was again brought to life in the reign of Peter the Great. By this Tsar, the theatre was regarded as one of the salient features of the cultivated life of the West, and he introduced it in Russia, together with his other reforms, with the object of civilizing his backward subjects. A special theatre was built in Moscow and various facilities, such as exemption from customary toll on entering the Kremlin, were afforded the people in order to spread more widely the new form of entertainment. But this effort was crowned with but a small measure of success, mainly owing to the fact that the German language in which the plays were performed rendered them unintelligible to the Russian audience, whilst the pieces produced in Russian, as well as the acting of the Russian players, seem to have failed in satisfying even the not too exact-

ing tastes of that time. The closing of this theatre, however, did not put an end to the drama in Russia. The initiative passed into private hands, and particularly amongst the upper classes, and at the schools amateur theatricals became more and more popular.

The determining factor in the planting of the drama on Russian soil was the spread of education which helped to create a dramatic literature, cultivated actors, and a receptive public. By the middle of the eighteenth century we find all these three elements fully in evidence, and since the establishment of a theatre by Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, the theatre in Russia may be said to have found its feet.

The names of Fyodor Volkov and Ivan Dmitrevsky stand particularly conspicuous in that early period of the Russian stage. The son of a provincial merchant, Volkov was apprenticed to his step-father's trade, and, while still in his youth, came to St Petersburg. There he made acquaint-

ance with the theatre which captured his imagination to such a degree that on returning home to Yaroslavle he immediately started a theatre of his own. His enterprize was crowned with an instant success which aroused interest in his work amongst the more cultivated members of the local nobility, and soon led to his being called to the capital by the Empress herself. He arrived there with his company, which also included his friend Dmitrevsky, pleased the Empress at his trial performance at the Court, and with his actor-friends was sent to the Cadet School to complete his education. Thus the nucleus of the first trained company of Russian actors was formed, making possible the establishment of a permanent Court theatre. Exceptional intelligence and organizing gifts naturally placed Volkov at the head of the company, whilst his efforts to popularize the art he loved so much, in the country have earned him the name of "the father of the Russian theatre." As an actor, however, Volkov was less remarkable than his fellow-worker

sky, who all represented successive grades in the development of the Russian classic repertoire. Griboyedov's contribution was confined to the single play of "Sorrow from Wisdom," which combined the most poignant satire on the society of the time with a picture of the spiritual drama of an idealist placed in a world of human monsters. The epigrammatic briskness of its dialogue, the wonderful moulding of its characters, and the general liveliness of its action have made "Sorrow from Wisdom" one of the most popular Russian comedies. Still greater influence in the Russian theatre belonged to Gogol's "Getting Married" and "Inspector-General." They both appeared in the thirties of the last century and up to this day have not lost a particle of their captivating charm. Gogol's characters are taken from a lower station of life than Griboyedov's, marking in this respect a continuous democratization of the Russian drama, but, if anything, they are even more strongly and subtly wrought. "The Inspector-

General," in particular, may be regarded as the greatest play in the Russian language extant, so superb is the inner coherence of its parts, and so profoundly fundamental seem to be the innumerable human masks revealed in the chiselled attitudes of its characters. If Griboyedov and Gogol set up the standard of literary and dramatic perfection, it was left to Ostrovsky to provide a varied and national repertoire. Hitherto musical vaudeville and soul-tearing melodrama had dominated the stage, but Ostrovsky opened out a new epoch of the Russian theatre when he introduced his uncouth and rough world of petty officials, tradesmen, and peasants, which he portrayed with painstaking realism, whilst yet preserving a complete command of the dramatic form. In this way the *genre* play became established on the stage, where it held sway right down to our own time, with this difference, however, compared with the time of Ostrovsky, that in the hands of his followers it soon deteriorated into cheap problem play and shallow anecdote.

To complete this review of the dramatic literature as we find it on the eve of this century, mention should be made of Sukhovo-Kobelin, Leo Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Alexis Tolstoy. They all occupied somewhat isolated positions amongst the playwrights of their time, and their contributions to the art of the drama were few and sporadic. Sukhovo-Kobelin's fame rests chiefly on his "Krechinsky's Marriage," which, indeed, is a truly remarkable piece of work. Its grotesque and tragic humour, in conjunction with the wonderful simplicity of its plot, recalls the methods of Molière and makes one regret that the play is totally unknown outside Russia. The two plays by Leo Tolstoy, "The Fruits of Culture" and "The Power of Darkness," together with his posthumous play "The Live Corpse," reveal the monumental workmanship, so characteristic of this author. The first two are the more powerful, and "The Fruits of Culture" is, perhaps, the best of the three. Here is a case when incessant



A scene in "UNCLE VANIA" by A. Chekhov, produced at the Moscow Art Theatre.

movement on the stage, continuous coming in and out, is not a sham bustle introduced by the stage-manager for the sake of realistic suggestion, but is indissolubly bound up with the life portrayed. Turgenev's plays did not enjoy great popularity during the period reviewed here, and for the simple reason that their lyrical tone, their subdued and gentle emotionalism, and their subtle form made them virtually foreign and unintelligible to the majority of actors and playgoers. Only when the plays of Chekhov, so kindred to Turgenev's in tone and treatment, were firmly installed in the popular favour by the efforts of the Moscow Art Theatre, was Turgenev's claim to recognition also unreservedly admitted. Lastly, it remains to mention Count Alexis Tolstoy's historical trilogy: "The Death of Ivan the Terrible," "Tsar Fyodor," and "Tsar Boris"—which together with Pushkin's "Boris Godunov" form characteristic specimens of poetic tragedy in the Russian theatre.

Let us now turn to the position of the

stage and cast a cursory glance at its development during that period, the dramatic literature of which has just been outlined. In the beginning of the last century Russia had two State-controlled theatres in Petrograd and Moscow. In addition to these, there were theatres in the provincial cities and numerous private stages on the estates of wealthy land-owners who kept companies of professional actors selected from amongst their serfs and compulsorily trained in the dramatic art. There is no need to dwell here on the terrible life of those unfortunate actors and actresses, whose enforced education made them doubly conscious of the iniquity of their position. Suffice it to say, that many of them achieved great distinction on the Imperial stage, while still remaining mere slaves. The two Imperial theatres combined opera, ballet, and drama, and most of the actors had to practise an extreme versatility of talent which, in spite of its manifest drawbacks, greatly helped them in the acquisition of a complete

mastery of technique. So, notwithstanding the lamentable poverty of its early repertoire, the Russian stage was never wanting in talented individuals whose names have since been ever famous. Such were Karatigin and Mochalov, and particularly so Schepkin, who from the humility of slavery worked himself up to the high position of principal actor on the Moscow Imperial stage. Three distinct methods of acting may be said to have been personified in those three great actors. The two elements of the actor's art which Talma, the famous French tragedian, following Diderot, defined as intelligence and sensibility, found their ideal exponents respectively in Karatigin and Mochalov. All that intellect could bring to bear on the creation of a part, whether in illuminating the character, the situation, or the environment, or whether in enabling the actor to make full use of his skilful technique, formed the striking distinction of the art of Karatigin. On the other hand, temperament and pathos, combined with the ability of com-

pletely merging his own self in the character presented, marked in a very high degree the art of Mochalov.

Both these actors concerned themselves mainly with the presentation of their own parts. It was the special merit of Schepkin that in addition to his exceptional power of impersonation, which harmoniously united both intelligence and sensibility, he always strove to present not just single characters, mutually detached and independent, but the play as a whole, a unity in which all parts bind and determine each other. This practice of the principle of ensemble, together with his bitter opposition to every kind of artificiality and affectation in the manner of acting, set its stamp on the work of the Moscow Imperial Dramatic Theatre, the Small Theatre, as it is generally called, which during the days of Schepkin and long after his death, became famous for the artistic thoroughness of its productions and even received the name of "The Home of Schepkin."

We shall see later on in what way Schepkin's traditions have regained their vital significance on the modern Russian stage. Meanwhile, let it be pointed out that by the end of last century these ideas lost much of their former hold over the actors, and this fact, coupled with the prevalence of the cheap problem and *genre* play, caused mechanical routine to set in and the higher aspects of the dramatic art to be disregarded. Not that there was a complete lack of great actors. Mme Savin, Davidov, and Varlamov at the Alexandrivsky Theatre, in Petrograd, and Mme Fedotov, Mme Ermolov, and Lensky at the Moscow Small Theatre, were actors of unusual magnitude, consummate masters of their art, second to none of their predecessors. But their striking individual gifts were unable to save the stage from the backslidings into which it had fallen. The "model" Imperial stage, which until the eighties maintained in both capitals a State monopoly of dramatic presentation, and was generally the leading stage in

the country (for this reason I leave outside the scope of this review the work of the provincial theatres), now no longer satisfied the more cultivated classes of playgoers. The general revival in the domain of art and literature which marked that period raised new demands and created new standards of artistic perfection. Above all, it helped to produce that critical state of mind which could not rest content with what seemed to exist only by dint of old-established tradition. Of all the spheres of artistic activity the theatre alone seemed lacking in life and the true spirit of art. A protest was inevitable in such conditions, and it was boldly raised by the two men who decided on launching the Moscow Art Theatre.

CHAPTER II

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

WE are told by the chroniclers of the Moscow Art Theatre how one summer day in 1897 Constantine Sergeyevich Alexeyev and Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko met at a restaurant and for eighteen hours on end discussed the position and the problems of the drama of their day. They had never met before. One was an amateur actor, the leader of a company of other amateurs—members of the Society of Art and Literature, which had distinguished itself by a number of carefully staged productions. The other was a successful playwright and a man of letters, whose devotion to the drama led him to the management of a school of acting. The dissatisfaction with the state of the Russian stage, which they both strongly felt, brought them together on

that eventful day in June of 1897, and resulted in the establishment of the Moscow Art Theatre, which, whatever its faults or merits, has certainly fixed an epoch in the theatre history of Russia. After a few more meetings and discussions, a definite programme was worked out and the zealous reformers set themselves enthusiastically to the task of carrying it out.

There were innumerable difficulties to overcome. The first of them was the problem of finding the necessary capital—not an easy thing in ordinary matters and how much more so where artistic enterprise is concerned. A number of patrons were approached, and fortunately a few were found willing to support the venture. The sum collected was by no means an overwhelming one—something over two thousand five hundred pounds in all—but the enthusiasm of the promoters was of course a much greater asset. Next the company was formed. The members of the Society of Art and Literature and the students of the Philharmonic School



The Moscow Art Theatre's staging of "THE CHERRY ORCHARD" by A. Chekhov.

supplied the bulk of the company. Amateurs and students! A poor material, one would think, to embark with on the ambitious scheme of creating a reformed theatre! And yet when we look through the list of names of the original company we cannot suppress our wonder at the number of those, who, since the "pre-historic" days of 1897 have attained popularity and even fame. Here we see Alexeyev himself, whose stage-name of Stanislavsky is a household word all over the country. Then, Mme Lilin, Luzhsky, Artem, and Sanin, from among his collaborators at the Society, and Mme Knipper, Mme Savitsky, Moskvina, and Meyerhold from among the students of Nemirovich-Danchenko—all have distinguished themselves as actors, or have otherwise left traces of their personality upon the modern Russian stage. The capital found, and the company formed, the next thing was to settle upon a theatre. After much hesitation and deliberation this problem was also solved, a small theatre being taken

the period. After all the doubts and fears with which the whole company was looking forward to the first production, this definite success at once relieved the strain of uncertainty, and raised the premature hope that the theatre was firmly established. But disappointment came when it was least expected. A number of new productions which followed "Tsar Fyodor" in the usual way of the repertoire system, and which amongst other plays included Hauptmann's "Sunken Bell," and "The Merchant of Venice," failed to catch the popular sympathy, and takings slowly, but surely, began to dwindle to such sums as nine or ten pounds per evening. In addition, the production of a play by Hauptmann entitled "Hannele," on the preparation of which a considerable sum of money had been spent, was suddenly forbidden on the ground that the ecclesiastical authorities objected to some of its parts. It will be easily understood what a feeling of depression set in amongst the members of the theatre. Fortunately, the production of the "Sea-

gull" by Chekhov, two months after the opening of the season, instantly changed the whole situation. "The Sea-gull" was a tremendous success, and with two such draws as this play and "Tsar Fyodor," the Moscow Art Theatre began to feel firmer ground under its feet.

The limits of this chapter do not permit of my further quoting the facts illustrating the external history of the Art Theatre. Suffice it to say that gradually it was able to overcome all the difficulties with which it had to contend, and to establish itself as the most popular theatre in Russia. It is now housed in a commodious and artistically decorated building and enjoys well-deserved prosperity. Its annual visits to Petrograd are a great feature in the life of that city, as the enthusiasm with which the Theatre is always received there, amply testifies. The queues of anxious applicants who two months before the actual performances spend several days and nights in the street in order to get their seats, provides sufficient illustration of the

interest taken in the work of the Art Theatre. I well remember a dismal and misty night a good many years ago, when, with several hundreds of such enthusiasts, I waited outside the booking office from ten o'clock in the evening till two o'clock next afternoon. And I was one of the more fortunate ones, in that one kind soul who had already waited for some twenty-four hours offered to share with me the seats he was entitled to buy, if I agreed to take his place in the queue. But this was my only experience of the kind. On other occasions I chose the easier, though perhaps the more parasitic course, of leaving the pleasure of the night duty to my more enthusiastic friends.

This eager interest in the art of the theatre is in itself a striking illustration of the atmosphere in which the modern Russian theatre has to carry on its work. It takes time, of course, for a new theatre to create and educate its own public, and in not a few cases a new venture broke down through lack of resources, before

the ideas put forward found favour with the public. But in Russia the playgoers are certainly more receptive and more alive to original work in the theatre than they are in other countries, where the public taste has been corrupted by the demoralizing influence of unblushing commercialism. In the case of the Moscow Art Theatre, the purer and more artistic atmosphere prevailing in Russia was one of the chief factors that assured its success at the time when, still uncertain of its own powers, it embarked on a new and seemingly revolutionary path.

Let us now examine more closely the principles which the Art Theatre gradually evolved in the course of its development.

The essential feature of the new theatre was embodied in its peculiar name—"The Moscow *Art* Theatre." Why an "Art" theatre? one may ask. One does not hear of "art painting" or "art music." Music or painting can be good or bad, but "art music"! The words seem simply to be redundant. Yet there was

sense in the appellation. A reference has already been made to the conditions prevailing on the Russian stage towards the end of last century. These conditions betrayed a state of provincial crudity, and were characterized by slovenliness and vulgarity of detail pretending to be realistic, which, singularly enough, flourished side by side with an exhibition of real dramatic genius on the part of a few gifted actors of the old school. The backslidings of this kind were so obnoxious to the taste of the better educated and more cultivated members of the public that drastic reform seemed to be urgently needed. The forms the new dramatic art was to assume, appeared, for the moment, perfectly clear: there was modern literature free and unrestricted in its portrayal of the world that corresponded to the intellectual and artistic demands of the modern man, and the drama, which was then considered but a branch of that literature, could have no other object save that of creating the same world on the



Characters from "THE BLUE BIRD," by M. Maeterlinck

(1) "SUGAR" (2) "TIME" (3) "BREAD"

The Production on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre.

boards of the theatre. Thus "Art" in the first place meant fidelity to the object represented, or, in the conditions of dramatic representation, a complete subordination of the methods of production to the subject of the play as this would exist outside the stage.

This general method, however, admitted of a variety of special forms. What peculiar features constitute the idea of reality? The simplest and the most natural answer would be: reality is what we see in real life, for is it not for this reason that we call it "real"? Once our material surroundings are faithfully reproduced, once the actors no longer act their parts but live in them, completely merged in the characters they represent, the stage is no longer a stage: it is transmuted into the world portrayed in the play. This tempting theory was enthusiastically adopted by the Art Theatre, the leaders of which had already had occasion of seeing how it worked in practice. Only a few years before they launched their theatre, the

famous German company of the Meiningen actors, under the leadership of Cronegk, had paid a visit to Moscow and startled the public by the extraordinary realistic effects it was able to produce, both in the setting and the method of acting. With this example in their mind the Art Theatre boldly proclaimed the gospel of naturalism as the only road to salvation—and proceeded eagerly to emulate Cronegk. A few illustrations from their productions of this period will enable us to see to what length the new creed was carried.

We all remember the time-honoured three cloths with painted ornaments, pictures and fireplaces, which in the unsophisticated days of our youth represented a house which served equally well to accommodate the characters of all periods and all countries. From the naturalistic standpoint this, of course, was not to be thought of, and so in the Art Theatre we were given a room broken up into a number of more or less independent parts, with a view of other real rooms seen through the doors,

and even with realistic suggestions of the stories above. Besides being nearer to "real life" this arrangement afforded special advantages for grouping the actors in different places, and introducing a greater variety. Needless to say, every setting on the stage of the Art Theatre faithfully reproduced the architecture, furniture, dress, and all other features of the period concerned. To achieve this accuracy the Art Theatre spared no efforts, as can be judged from the fact that special missions were sent to Rome when "Julius Cæsar" was produced, to Silesia when "The Carrier Henschel" by Hauptmann was staged, and to various parts of Russia whenever a play possessed a semblance of local "colour." For some plays even local dialects were specially studied. With this fidelity to "nature," one will hardly be surprised to learn that rain on the Art stage did make the actors wet, that waterfalls were no sham imitation, or that specially embossed and painted papier-mâché lining produced a perfect illusion of

mud. In the same way, walls, cornices, and doors were made of their proper materials or suitable substitutes. And there were innumerable tiny articles on the tables and shelves to give the impression of the actual environment in which people lived.

If we turn to the method of acting we find a similar thing. All affectation in the manner of speech or acting was rigorously suppressed. Principal characters were deprived of all the artificial glamour, with which the conventional stage surrounds them in order to emphasize their importance. On the other hand, the secondary parts and the masses in which the leading members of the company had to appear, were raised to the same level as the central characters. A complete unity of the life portrayed, sustained throughout the play, and in this way a perfect ensemble of acting, running without a hitch, became the watchword of the Art Theatre.

It is important not to confuse the two methods of acting just described. The

naturalistic method tended to reduce the contrasts between what was the principal and the secondary, the climax and the moments leading up to it, to the dead level of the mean, and agreed ill with many of the plays produced, particularly of the classical repertoire opposed to naturalism. On the contrary, the method of ensemble which the Art Theatre employed, revealed undreamed of possibilities in co-ordinated acting and has since become one of the most valuable means in *representing* (and I lay special stress on this word) the world pictured in the play.

CHAPTER III

THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE (*continued*)

THE consistent faithfulness in the external form which guided the Art Theatre during the first period of its existence, soon underwent an important evolution. The change was brought about by the unusual character and form of the plays by Chekhov, which with unprecedented daring discarded the age-long conventions of the theatre. The merit for bringing Chekhov on to the stage belongs mainly to Nemirovich-Danchenko, who perceived in his plays the spiritual significance and the freedom of treatment that were the avowed object of the Art Theatre. How far Nemirovich-Danchenko was carried by his enthusiasm for Chekhov will be seen from the fact that he was on the point of refusing the prize which the Academy awarded him for his play "The Price of Life," arguing

that it should in all justice have been conferred upon Chekhov's "Sea-gull." It was also his faith in Chekhov that enabled him to bring over to his side Stanislavsky, who in the beginning was loath to share his friend's enthusiasm. There were, however, other circumstances which spoke strongly against producing Chekhov.

"The Sea-gull," the play selected by the Art Theatre, had already been played at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petrograd, with Vera Kommissarzhevsky in the leading part, but the reception it had there was most discouraging. In fact, never before in the whole history of the Alexandrinsky Theatre had its portly walls witnessed such an outburst of indignation. The play was booed and hissed, and the poor and suffering author had to flee to the warm Crimea to find solace for his outraged feelings. But as the adage says, he who dares will succeed, and the Art Theatre proved its mettle by securing for "The Sea-gull" the success it deserved. With this and the four other plays by Chekhov, "Uncle Vania," "Ivanov,"

"The Three Sisters," and "The Cherry Orchard," which it produced during its lifetime, the Moscow Art Theatre has for ever bound the name of Chekhov with its own, and it may with equal justice be said that Chekhov as dramatist stands as much by the Art Theatre as does the Art Theatre by Chekhov. Now, what are the peculiar features of Chekhov's plays?

The characteristic that distinguishes them at the very first glance is the complete lack of dramatic plot, or "action" as it is called. They are static in their very nature, presenting nothing but mere scenes of life. Again, the life itself as represented in these plays, is infinitely removed from the life usually shown on the stage. It has no marked contrasts of light and shade, and its human beings are made up of elements that completely disagree with the traditional recipes of the dramatic craft. No garb of the types established in the genre-play, not to mention melodrama, could possibly fit Chekhov's heroes with their complex and strikingly individual

features. This static nature of Chekhov's plays, together with the subtle drawing of his characters, was further enhanced by the special traits of the class of the Russian people which he depicted in his pieces. For various historical reasons, which I need not dwell upon here, the Russian "intelligentsia" of the time of Chekhov presented, in its greatest part at least, a class of weak-willed individuals, handicapped in applying their gifts to the solution of practical problems by the peculiar social and political conditions prevalent at the time, and for this reason mostly given to introspection and dreaming, that helped to relieve the soul. Despair and pessimism born of aimless life, and the pursuit of dreamy idealism in the hope of finding refuge from depressing environment, concealed innumerable elements of personal tragedy which, in the irresistible and unalterable flow of events, approached even the ancient tragedy of fate. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chekhov chose and crystallized dramatic plots out of this

world. Drama did not develop there ; it simply assumed gradually more distinct and visible forms in the process of emerging from the chaos of the surrounding atmosphere. Thus the atmosphere, itself, the very tone, became the characteristic feature of Chekhov's plays. To be faithful to Chekhov, meant faithfulness to his atmosphere. But how was this to be suggested by the naturalistic methods which the Art Theatre employed ? The appearance of things as they are is full of contrasts and tends to arouse opposing sentiments. To Chekhov's atmosphere, however, unity of impression was essential, and this could be achieved only by one method—the method of selection.

Now, selection may mean dropping details, and then it imports simplification. Or selection may also mean choosing a definite idea or sentiment and dropping all that is alien to it, then it denotes style. As is obvious, style is not opposed to naturalism taken in its broad sense. I do not refer in this case to historical style,

which is a recognized province of naturalism, but to style as the result of preponderance given to some peculiar feature. This can easily be brought out even in the ordinary naturalistic world, and the only problem would then be to ascertain the exact feature, the cue to the style.

With regard to Chekhov's plays, the Art Theatre found the tone of their atmosphere in the peculiar key of their dialogue and the continuity of their action, which produce an incessant flow of movements and words, all couched in subdued tones and, owing to the lack of contrasts, all clinging to each other in one slow and continuous stream. The musical character of Chekhov's atmosphere is suggested by the author himself, who often employs musical sounds in order to produce the necessary impression. The Art Theatre only further developed the same feature when it introduced chirping of crickets, trampling of horses going over a bridge in the distance, and such like devices, and though it was much ridiculed for these "tricks," it seems to me that all

such sneers and opposition were merely due to a lack of understanding of the peculiar dramatic form fostered by the Art Theatre. To the same group of productions in which the lyrical atmosphere of the "interieur" formed the chief tone of the play, belong a few stagings of Turgenev's plays. Particularly remarkable was "A Month in the Country," in which the musical effect of the dialogue was further enhanced by the exquisite scenery painted by Dobuzhinsky.

The two principles of production described above marked the first period of the Art Theatre. Simple copying of nature (faithfulness in the external form) and selective copying of nature (faithfulness in revealing the predominant feature, the style) were both applied to a number of productions of Ibsen which, naturalistic though they were, prepared the ground for a new departure in the methods of the Art Theatre. It was the time when symbolism in literature gradually established itself in the popular favour and numerous attempts were made to do away with realistic staging. The

Art Theatre also yielded to the general tendency, and in a number of productions tried to discover new forms. Thus in Knut Hamsun's "At the Gates of the Kingdom" an experiment was tried of reducing the scenery and the accessories down to the barest minimum, after the method of the "conventional staging" so-called. In Andreyev's "Life of Man" simplification was served in a somewhat naturalistic garb. Whilst the volatile symbolism of Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird" was presented even without much simplification, the method adopted being that described above as selective copying of nature, or style: that is to say, the poetic world pictured by Tytyl and Mytyl was realized on the stage in all its entirety as seen by a child, but, of course, through the eyes of a grown-up.

This symbolistic reaction, however, was but a passing craze inevitable in the evolution of the Art Theatre, but little characteristic of its achievement. I shall deal at a greater length with the problem of conventional and symbolical staging when

I describe the work of Meyerhold. For the moment I shall restrict myself only to the following observation. Notwithstanding all its vacillations during this period the Art Theatre remained ever faithful to that principle of "faithfulness" which it proclaimed at the beginning of its career. From the casual external, through the specific external, "faithfulness" passed to the casual spiritual. Whatever symbolical plays this theatre produced, it always attempted to present them as mere psychological problems. Psychological interpretation became the object which the Art Theatre set itself to attain.

The evolution of "faithfulness" did not stop at this. Once the inner, the spiritual world became the centre of interest, it required only another step to make one look for a body with which to clothe the soul. Psychological features, crystallized into characters, now began to be regarded as the central points from which reality issued, and which shed their light on the matter enveloping them. Thus, the fourth

stage, the stage of "artistic realism," so called, was reached, marking the completion of the circle of "faithfulness." Its outward expression it found in realistic simplification on the basis of character, which had the effect of plastic moulding of individual character on the background of neutral and also simplified environment. It is in this sense that the canons of scenic art left by Schepkin may be said to have been brought to life again by Stanislavsky and his collaborators.

Having traced the evolution of the Moscow Art Theatre, it is opportune now to point out what it actually stands for, what its significance is with regard to the general problem of the theatre. There will be no difficulty in recognizing the basic principle which lay at the foundation of all the experiments of the Art Theatre, tacitly admitted as the natural and the only artistic form of the theatre. This principle was *representation*. The object of the theatre was understood not to *present* a play through the medium of the stage, but

to *represent* it as an independent entity existing side by side with the observing audience. The subject of the play was considered as a picture of some definite world perfectly complete in itself and needing only a faithful reproduction to become a living world on the stage. Of the two elements of the theatre, the stage and the audience, the second operated merely as some superfluous attachment making itself felt only through the necessity of providing for it the huge window of the stage through which it could get a glimpse of the world enacted. This admission of a barrier dividing the theatre into two independent parts, was the actual factor which determined the whole course of the Art Theatre's activity. If illusionism in the way of representation was to be carried to its furthest limits, if, in addition, the illusory world thus created was to exist entirely by its own means, detached from, and independent of, the spectator, I can see no reason why the Art Theatre should be reproached, as it has often been, for such



VERA KOMMISSARZHEVSKY in "SISTER BEATRICE" by M. Maeterlinck,
as produced by V. Kommissarzhevsky

alleged tricks as the so-called "fourth wall," *i.e.* a row of furniture placed along the footlights, or its crickets, frogs, and "such like baggage," which were intended only to make living nature speak for itself. To refute the case of the Moscow Art Theatre it is necessary to prove that representation is not the object of the theatre, or that it must not be objective, or, lastly, that it must not be naturalistically-objective.

Without going into the argument at this instant, I will only point out that the subsequent development of the Russian theatre, following in the direction opposite to the methods of the Art Theatre, passed through all the indicated grades of reaction, taking them in the reversed order: first, objectivism in the symbolical garment, then subjectivism, and, finally, presentation, as a method entirely opposed to illusionism of any kind.

There are a few minor points which are invariably brought out when the work of the Art Theatre is discussed. I shall deal

tions of theatrical work a serious obstacle raised against the Art Theatre's methods.

I have reserved to the end of my remarks on the Art Theatre Mr Craig's interesting appearance on its stage as the producer of "Hamlet." The production had a somewhat mixed reception in Russia, though one must not lose sight of the fact that the conditions which obtained on the Art stage were not the most favourable for a successful realization of Mr Craig's ideas. There are, doubtless, points of similarity between the theories of Mr Craig and those of Stanislavsky. One is that both of them profess the cult of the stage-director, Mr Craig going even as far as to proclaim the puppet a superior actor to the man. There are, however, other points which divide the two. In contrast to Stanislavsky's partiality to naturalism Mr Craig affects a liking for a kind of super-naturalism, which is not always even symbolical. In fact, in Mr Craig's opposition to naturalism, it is the voice of a mystic and philosopher, it seems to me, rather than that of an artist that

we hear. Again, we know what Stanislavsky's guiding principle was—representation, whereas Mr Craig's position on this point has never been made quite clear, his thought always vacillating between the desire of *representing* a higher, supernatural world, for which he designs his cyclopic scenic effects, and the desire of *presenting* his message to the audience on the Elizabethan apron stage. It is not surprising, therefore, that Stanislavsky's theatre, coached in naturalistic traditions, failed to do full justice to Mr Craig's idea of staging "Hamlet" in the terms of a supernatural conflict between the powers of good and evil. Nor were his ideas of screen-scenery sufficiently worked out in detail, nor tested in practice, to admit of their adequate realization on the Art stage. Taken on the whole, the production of "Hamlet" should be viewed as an extremely interesting experiment, inconclusive, however, owing to the peculiar conditions in which it was carried out.

CHAPTER IV

KOMMISSARZHEVSKY AND MEYERHOLD

THE tentative efforts of the Moscow Art Theatre to discover new forms beyond the naturalistic, provide a favourable ground for a clearer understanding of the work accomplished by its principal opponent, the theatre of Vera Kommissarzhevsky in Petrograd. A few words about the great actress whose name the theatre bore should serve as an introduction to our analysis. If you ask the modern Russian for the name of an actress who impressed her image most on the present generation, he will unhesitatingly answer: Vera Kommissarzhevsky. The sympathy which this actress was able to evoke in the public, often verged on the border of a cult. Her power of impersonation was great. But infinitely greater still was the appeal of her own personality. What charm it had,

it is difficult to define. She was not pretty, and yet she was fascinating. But, if anything, it was her voice that charmed most. Deep and ringing, it seemed to throb with some mystic fervour, to carry some prophetic message of the other world. Was there a man or a woman who did not fall a victim to her enchantment? For my own part, I can recollect no other impression of the stage which could rival in force the image of "Hilda" which Kommissarzhevsky created in "The Master Builder" by Ibsen. The theatrical career of this actress was, unfortunately, too brief. She began it on the stage of the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petrograd, where she immediately became the favourite of the public. Then followed the years of eager attempts to find new forms, when she ventured to start a theatre of her own, and invited Meyerhold to be her stage-director. The venture was not a complete success in the material sense, and Kommissarzhevsky went on a tour in the country, which brought her eventually to Tashkend, in Central

Asia. There, while buying a carpet in the market, she contracted an infectious disease and shortly afterwards died, still in the full blossom of her powers.

Kommissarzhevsky's association with Meyerhold can easily be understood. The mystic leanings of her temperament found little scope for self-expression in the dramatic forms which prevailed on the Russian stage at the time. Meyerhold's ideas of a new theatre seemed to answer her own aspirations, and thus the union was effected.

I had occasion to mention Meyerhold as one of the students of Nemirovich-Danchenko's school who joined the Art Theatre company on its formation. After some three years of work with the company, Meyerhold left it, dissatisfied with the methods followed by Stanislavsky, and went on a tour in the provinces, endeavouring to discover new methods of producing plays of the modern repertoire. In 1902 we find him again at the Art Theatre as the head of its experimental branch,

which was known as "The Studio Theatre." A year's work, however, in that theatrical laboratory brought Meyerhold to the conclusion that naturalistic methods were inartistic in themselves and utterly unsuitable for the production of symbolical or more or less abstract plays. A new and more independent stage became necessary for the application of the principle thus established, and severing connection with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold joined the theatre of Vera Kommissarzhevsky.

What were the new ideas proclaimed by Meyerhold? In the literature on the theatre they have since been defined as "stylisation" and "conventionalism." Though appropriate in themselves, these terms, in my opinion, fail to indicate the fundamental difference which distinguished the new movement from the Moscow Art Theatre. This, I consider, was not so much an opposition between realism and conventionalism as that between the objective method of representation and the subjective one. The Art Theatre placed

the centre of gravity of the production on the stage, Meyerhold transferred it to the audience. It would have made scarcely an atom of difference to the adequacy and completeness of the Art Theatre's performance, if the audience had been entirely removed. On the other hand, the very life would have been taken out of Meyerhold's productions if they had been subjected to the same experiment. Having, so to speak, taken sides with the audience, Meyerhold was simply bound by the very nature of his position to reject the naturalistic method. It was no longer a question of picking and choosing whatever one liked out of a complete reproduction of the world on the stage, but rather of evoking a fuller vision of the world by showing a glimpse of it on the boards. To this subjective vision held by the audience, the stage production had to appeal, and with this vision it was indissolubly bound up. And in this way the ideas of "conventionalism" and "stylisation" came into being.

There is a good deal of misconception

prevalent with regard to the inner significance of these terms. They were coined to denote something departing from the methods of the realistic school, which were supposed to give the only adequate representation of real life. But, as must have been made clear by the previous remarks, all forms of the theatre, as well as of art in general, derive their significance from the attitude taken up by the spectator. So far as "stylisation" and "conventionalism" are concerned they are not more conventional, in the strict sense of the word, than realism itself. The Russian name for "conventionalism" is "conditionalism," and in this form it at once reveals its true nature. This may be expressed in a few words: "certain premises admitted, corresponding conclusions must needs be drawn." If one agrees to assign certain powers to various cards, or chess figures, or mathematical symbols, or government officials, the combinations which may arise in the course of play, or calculation, or political strife, would be

neither arbitrary, nor unreal—they would be merely “conditional.” In the same way, if one attempts to view the world from some peculiar standpoint according to the sentiment or attitude of mind that dominates one at the moment, or is one’s individual peculiarity or national characteristic, the vision of the world one obtains is as real and inevitable in its logic as, say, is the indisputable fact that the sky looks dark after the sun has set. In other words, “conventionalism” means an admission of legitimacy of various other standpoints besides the objectively-realistic, which latter is also a convention only supposed to be a natural one. This admission of convention is further qualified in “stylisation,” which subjects all the sentiments or ideas, embodied in a work of art, to the control of one guiding sentiment or principle chosen. This method accepted, the success of a theatrical production will depend on the sensitiveness evinced by the producer in discovering the leading sentiment of the play represented, and by his

cleverness in finding the forms that would appropriately express that sentiment. The task is by no means an easy one, as has unfortunately too often been proved by many who have ventured to tackle it before they had acquired the necessary qualifications. Meyerhold stands out in this respect as the producer who showed the utmost sensibility in revealing the spirit of the work performed.

Let us now trace the course followed by Meyerhold in order that we may see what new forms of dramatic art were evolved by him, and how they actually originated.

The convention adopted by Meyerhold during the first period of his work was drawn mainly from the character of Maeterlinck's dramas which at that time particularly engaged his attention. The object of Maeterlinck in his plays is to reveal the inner mysteries of life by making the audience experience them as actual facts. His ambition is to break down the barrier between the stage and the audience and cause the performance to become a kind of

religious service in which the individuality of the spectator merges into some sublime vision of the inner world. The solution of this problem offered by Meyerhold does great credit to his sense of theatrical form. He staged Maeterlinck's dramas on one plane, *i.e.* he reduced the depth of the stage to a narrow band close to the footlights and placed the actors against flat decorative scenery, aiming thereby to dematerialize the stage and to merge the action of the play in the sway of emotions felt by the audience.

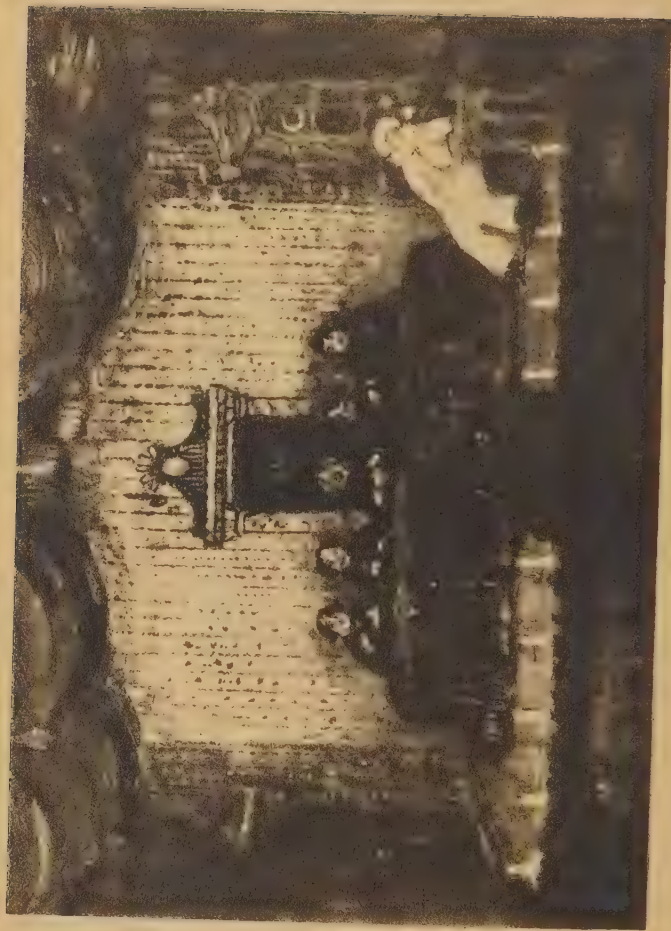
Though the use of flat setting was by no means a new discovery, its application by Meyerhold is remarkable for the understanding of the psychological nature of flat surfaces which it so strikingly revealed. Nothing is so capable of destroying the opposition between the spectator and the object observed as the perception of a flat surface. It was this peculiar fact that helped Meyerhold in uniting the audience and the stage, and in creating a genuine mystic atmosphere. In addition to this

visual effect, other devices were used to bring out the main sentiment of Maeterlinck's plays. Thus, the latent dialogue so-called, *i.e.* the inner attitudes accompanying the external action, was made manifest by plastic movements of the performers and by the cold and metallic diction denuded of the ordinary emotional intonation.

But whilst endeavouring to realize on the stage the "style" of Maeterlinck's plays, Meyerhold could not fail to perceive that in some respects the convention adopted by him clashed with another which he yet dimly conceived, namely, the convention of the stage. Placing the bodies of the actors, which were in relief, against flat decorative screens, seemed to exemplify one of the incongruities thus produced, and Meyerhold was soon led to recognize that the method of setting in low relief with decorative painting of scenery is opposed to the very spirit of the stage as we have it. Further, he began to see that the pictorial appeal of the decorative scenery had an adverse effect on the unity

of impression, distracting the attention of the audience from the acting. On the other hand, the position of the actor now acquired in his eyes an importance which it had not possessed before. The actor came to be regarded now as the central element of the play, an element which was to occupy the very foremost place in the performance. The figure of the actor had to stand out like a statue, focussing upon itself the whole stress and power of expression. This idea, labelled with the name of "statuesqueness," was hailed as a successor to the method of low relief, bringing in its train a series of further interesting developments. One of them loomed particularly large in the dramatic criticisms of the time, though neither Meyerhold nor any of his followers actually attempted its realization.

It was formulated by the poet Fyodor Sologub as "the theatre of a single will," and by another poet, Viacheslav Ivanov, as "the theatre of congregate action." The idea lying at the root of this movement



Sketch by N. SAPUNOV for *Alexander Blok's "LITTLE BOOTH"* produced by
V. Meyerhold at the Theatre of V. Kommissarzhevsky.

was simple enough. The theatre, it was argued, is capable of revealing the inner mysteries of life and of arousing religious sentiment. These, however, can never attain to their highest intensity so long as the audience remains merely a passive observer. The example of the early Greek theatre and the mediæval mystery-plays provides the form in which the audience not merely listens to what is proceeding on the stage, but itself takes an active part in the performance. The theatre, united into one whole, thus becomes a temple, with the stage as a sacrificial altar, serving as a medium of religious purification. A parallel is instantly suggested by the drama of Maeterlinck. There is, however, this difference between the two: whereas in the case of Maeterlinck the audience is made to merge and abandon its individuality in the world represented on the boards, the Russian theorists endeavoured to bring the stage over to the audience.

The connection between these theories and Meyerhold's ideas of statuesque staging

followed from the assumption that the actor—a real human being freed from the bondage of decorative scenery—shared with the audience the task of realizing the subject of the play, the one in action, the other in imagination. It required only a further step to make the actor come down from the stage and draw the audience into the ecstasy of religious performance. It will, perhaps, be fitting in this connection just to remark that similar developments, though somewhat different in their origin, were carried out in Germany, where Dr Georg Fuchs, of the Munich theatre, worked out the theory of statuesque staging, and Max Reinhardt made some interesting experiments in reviving the forms of the Greek theatre. Whether these actually influenced Meyerhold and the Russian stage, I am not prepared here to say.

CHAPTER V

MEYERHOLD (*continued*)

THE evolution of Meyerhold's ideas did not stop at "statuesqueness." While still in the process of working out a new form of the theatre out of the struggle of conflicting "styles," Meyerhold had to sever his ties with the theatre of Kommissarzhevsky, and after a lapse of two years, he transferred his experimental work to the stage of the Imperial Alexandrinsky Theatre. At the time the fact caused much surprise in the public mind. It was difficult to reconcile oneself to the sight of the recognized leader of the advanced movement appearing on the stage that was the very embodiment of tradition and conservative spirit. And yet the change was only a natural consequence of the ideas formulated before. As will be remembered, the actor came to be regarded by Meyerhold as the main

vehicle of dramatic expression. This necessarily involved a recognition of technique, of school. And it was the continuity of tradition and the mastery of technique that distinguished the old and brilliant school of actors of the Alexandrinsky Theatre. No compunction could have, therefore, been felt by Meyerhold in transferring his activity to the new surroundings, more particularly as he was given a free hand in carrying out his experiments.

His ideas by that time reached a new stage of development. The immense importance of the actor having been unreservedly admitted, the next step was to recognize "acting," *i.e.* frank and consistent exhibition of the actor's dexterity as the only artistic form of playing. This at once transformed the whole aspect of the dramatic performance. Instead of attempting to give a representation (objective or subjective) of the world set out in the play, an agent-intermediary in the shape of the actor was introduced between

the play and the audience, to *present* the piece through his natural prism of "theatricality." The new standpoint immediately brought to the forefront a number of the fundamental problems of the theatre. One of the most important amongst them was the problem of proscenium. Out of the general problem of the relationship between the stage and the audience which, in the productions of Maeterlinck's plays, seemed to find its solution in a practical destruction of the stage as an independent entity, and which in the succeeding short period suggested a tendency towards a transformation of the auditorium into an orchestra, as this was known in the Greek theatre—out of this general problem the problem of the proscenium came to the front as its specific theatrical expression. No difficulty was present in solving it on the basis of the new principle of presentation. If the stage and the audience were to be united, it was perfectly clear that the only medium through which this union could be brought about was the actor, and the

only place wherein it could be effected was the proscenium.

There was, however, this difference between the union by means of the actor and the proscenium, and that attempted in Meyerhold's earlier productions. Then, the object was to transform the theatre into a temple or a convent-cell. Now, special stress was laid on the peculiar features of the theatre as the theatre. Illusionism, both of the subjective and the objective variety, was to be mercilessly swept out from the precincts of the stage, which was to be reinstated in its ancient rights, as the place where undisguised "theatricality" reigns free and unashamed.

But it will be asked whether this strange "theatricality," which seems to have been so utterly discredited by absurd conventional gestures and poses, and false affectation of speaking, is really capable of infusing any fresh blood in the theatre. The answer is that there is theatricality and theatricality. As understood by Meyerhold it stands, in the first place,

for "spectacle" or "show," *i.e.* a presentation of a play which is always to remain merely a play on the boards of the stage. In the second place, theatricality stands for the two methods of acting which follow from the nature of show: the mask and the grotesque.

Once the actor is put in the position of a magician, at the pointing of whose wand things are suddenly transformed into wondrous beings, he cannot but use his power to its utmost limits in endeavouring, by every movement of his body, every change in the intonation of his voice, every expression of his face, to convey to the spectator the innumerable aspects of humanity and the world at large, which are hidden in the familiar types and expressions. The mask is, therefore, a schematized and abstract feature, fixed by the actor in some visual image. It may be stereotyped or more fluid; it may also be made up of some material as in the Greek theatre, or it may be expressed in the acting itself.

As to the grotesque, the use of this method is confined to a somewhat narrower sphere. It resolves itself into a perpetual play of contrasts following upon each other. Sublimity and triviality, beauty and ugliness, joy and sorrow, courage and cowardice, are all interwoven in a fantastic pattern as were the flowers and human figures on the walls of Roman grottoes. The mediæval stalls and the Italian *Commedia dell' arte* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the best known examples of the theatres in which the principle of the "show," together with its derivative forms of the mask and the grotesque, was most completely realized. It is not surprising for this reason, that the watchword of the new movement has become: "Back to the Booth and the *Commedia dell' arte*."

Meyerhold and his followers go even as far as to accept unreservedly the method of improvisation practised by the *Commedia dell' arte*. In this Italian theatre, the play was reduced to a mere scenario in which only the general outlines of the

plot were indicated, whilst the dialogue was improvised by the actors themselves. No doubt there are great advantages in this method, if the actors prove themselves capable of the task. But there is sufficient evidence in the history of the theatre to show that in the majority of cases the actors, when left entirely to themselves, never rose above the commonplace and hackneyed, and those who did, like Shakespeare and Molière, by this very fact joined themselves to the ranks of literary men. Besides, even in the *Commedia dell' arte* real improvisation was frequently replaced by incessant and entirely inappropriate repetition of the turns which found particular favour. The fully legitimate desire of clearing the stage of all literary influences has led Meyerhold to hardly justifiable extremes, which, I am sure, practical experience will compel him, if it has not done so already, to admit.

Certain qualifications must also be made with regard to the use of the mask and the grotesque in the *Commedia dell' arte*.

The mask in this instance did serve as an elementary image, fixed and immovable, or as a certain formula of various types and aspects of the humanity of those days.¹ But the wide horizon of transcendental realities, which pleases us most in the masks, could have hardly existed for the Italian audiences of the seventeenth century. It is scarcely to be imagined that the theatre-goers of that period could have been alive to the multiplicity of masks in one individual, their fascinating succession one after another, the doubles they serve to produce, and the abstract, flattening effect they have on the very images they embody, as in the poetic "Little Booth," by Alexander Blok, where Pierrot has a double Harlequin and dreams of Columbine as a "paste-board" maiden of his heart. Also the grotesque and the monstrous were taken at that time in a much simpler

¹ It is only in this abstract sense that one may speak of the use of the mask in the *Commedia dell' arte*. In the material sense of the word the mask was used in the contemporary "masked comedy" of A. Beolco (Ruzzante), which, however, had only a slight influence on the Italian theatre.

spirit than Meyerhold would have us take them now. In this case, as in that of the mask, the higher irony, the "transcendental buffoonery," to use the words of Schlegel, are, of course, only the legacy bequeathed to us by the German romanticists of the early nineteenth century. Our appreciation of these theatrical forms depends, not on their past, but on the demands of our own spirit, which they are capable of satisfying.

As to the actual productions by Meyerhold, in which the above principles have been put to a test, I have to restrict myself to a few brief remarks. Two landmarks may be noted in his development along the lines described. Strange as it may appear, the first refers to the early period when Meyerhold had just joined the theatre of Kommissarzhevsky. The play produced was Block's "Little Booth," already mentioned, in which a pathetic story is related of Pierrot's languorous love for the beautiful, ever feminine Columbine, who now assumes the image of death, and

now of a paste-board maiden. After the manner of the romanticists, an author is introduced into the action, who interpolates puerile remarks, whilst the whole play is enfolded in an atmosphere at once mystic and grotesque. It happened thus that, by a happy coincidence, the style of this play, which was the main concern with Meyerhold at that time, embodied that very essence of theatricality which later became for him the style of the stage, as it were. The other landmark was Molière's "Don Juan," produced at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in 1910. Here the principles of the show were frankly and consciously admitted, the play being set up as a brilliant spectacle displayed before the audience. Full lights were maintained in the hall, and an additional reminder of the fact that this was merely a staged spectacle, was provided by the presence on the stage of little Arabs who, in the fashion of the time of *le Roi Soleil*, drew curtains and waited on the actors.

CHAPTER VI

EVEREÏNOV, FOKIN, AND BENOIS

I NOW pass to another representative of the same school as Meyerhold, whose name has already been brought before the eyes of the English public. Evereïnov succeeded Meyerhold at the Theatre of Kommissarzhevsky after the attempts at conventional staging, having described a complete cycle of development, reached the point from which one road led to theatricality and the other to further forms of illusionism. Playing on the imagination of the audience was the form of representation adopted by Meyerhold, and was followed by Evereïnov in his theory of "monodrama."

If the object in producing a play was to convince the spectator that what was happening on the stage was only a part of himself and his real life, there seemed to

be no reason why the spectator should not be convinced that it is he himself who lives and acts in the world represented. The only question was how to produce this effect, and here Evereïnov's conception of "monodrama" was advanced as its possible solution. The usual form of the drama, argued Evereïnov, in which each character lives as he actually is and appears to himself, compels the spectator to live simultaneously through the experience of all the characters presented. Both the hero and the villain, with all their conflicting emotions, have to be followed sympathetically at one and the same time. As a consequence, the attention of the spectator is continually drawn in opposite directions, and he naturally feels himself an outsider. What if the whole plot was staged as viewed by the principal character, the other characters and the environment changing in their appearance with the change of his sentiment and attitude? Would not this introduce a unity into the play and help to bridge the stage and

the auditorium? The protagonist, who, to make things clearer, might be called "Ego," would conduct the spectator through all his vicissitudes as his invisible "alter ego," his double, and the illusion of reality would therefore be raised to the highest pitch.

Such was Evereïnov's theory, and within the narrow limits of subjective illusionism, it doubtless presented an original development. There is, however, this fatal contradiction concealed in it, that whilst invoking the spectator's power of imagination, in which sense it is subjective, it is compelled to base itself mainly on the realistic scenic effects, such as are provided by various lighting and musical devices, which illustrate the changing moods and standpoints of the protagonist. This carries illusionism even further back than the chirping crickets, croaking frogs, curtains blown by the wind, and other mechanical tricks of the Moscow Art Theatre. The whole thing seems to be reduced to the level of a popular children's game, in which one child, standing in front,

makes a speech, whilst another behind, with arms slipped under the arms of the first, illustrates the speech by appropriate gestures. The game is very amusing and, I am afraid, Evereïnov's monodrama, if realized on the stage, would have a similar effect, instead of creating a complete illusion of reality as desired by the producer.¹

It is difficult to establish a link between Evereïnov's monodrama and his later theories of "theatricality." The guiding principle, apparently, was the idea of spectacular display which in monodrama revealed itself in the prominence given to purely visual effects, and which later was generalized into the dictum: "The word plays a subordinate part in the theatre.

¹ Curiously enough, some of the "monodramatic" effects advocated by Evereïnov, have for long been stock-in-trade of the kinema, the audiences of which, for example, are treated to the illusion of a moving motor car at a "stand-still," while stationary houses appear to be flying swiftly into distance. However, as far as my own experience goes, I have never, in such circumstances, been under the impression that it was I who was seated in the car and the hero of all the extraordinary adventures which kinema cars are in the habit of undergoing.



"ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY" on the stage of the Old-Time Theatre.

We hear more by eyes than by ears. Ergo—literature must not dominate the stage but must play second-fiddle to the independent art of the theatre.” Evereïnov’s “theatricality,” however, is not quite equivalent to the art of the theatre. It embraces a much wider range of human activities, originating, actually, in life itself and ascending thence to its highest expression on the stage. By theatricality he understands the power of seeming transformation which he believes to be deeply rooted in the human character. To appear what one is not, to transform life into a continuous performance, is the ideal which should be set up by humanity and which, in his opinion, is being trampled upon by the prosaic, common, and distasteful people of our day.

It hardly enters into the scope of this essay to criticize this far-reaching theory. As set forth in Evereïnov’s writings it is just a specimen of drawing-room philosophy, with the familiar clap-trap about the commonness of things common, which is

rather too stale in the year. And in a country like this, with its superb specimens of theatricality, such as the Salvation Army and the pompous proceedings of various official bodies, to quote only one or two familiar examples, it would have neither the interest of novelty, nor the attraction of an original form. Moreover, it is plain that Evereïnov preaches his theatricality with all the deadly earnest of a real zealot, and thus inadvertently gives all the show away. How much more inspiring it is to see the proverbial Roman augurs meet and pass by with a smile on their lips!

Of Evereïnov's productions it must be said that his method of monodrama has only partially been tested on the stage. But his work in the Old-Time and Merry theatres, in which he endeavoured to revive the features, as well as the plays, of the Mediæval stalls, presented considerable interest both in the historic and the theatrical sense. Together with Meyerhold's productions in the "House of Intermediæ,"

and the activity of other cabaret and burlesque stages in Petrograd and Moscow, such as "The Distorted Mirror" and "The Bat," it marks the latest phase of the theatrical development in Russia along the lines of the comical grotesque.

I have yet to make a passing reference to the effect which the ideas, evolved on the dramatic stage, produced on the Russian ballet and opera. The performances of the Russian dancers in London were not an isolated phenomenon free from connection with the rest of the theatrical life of the country. On the contrary, they were only a ramification of the tree planted and nurtured on the dramatic stage. The new spirit in the ballet introduced by Fokin was an echo of the principles of conventional staging which Meyerhold had earlier proclaimed and developed in the theatre of Kommissarzhevsky. With naturalism in scenery and setting finally discarded, the ballet productions followed the drama in adopting "style" as a form of artistic convention determining both dancing and

scenery. What distinguished Fokin's application of this method from that pursued by Meyerhold, was due mainly to the difference in the temperament of the two men. Meyerhold in his productions inclined towards the mystical and kindred experiences. The disposition of Fokin, on the other hand, showed more in the direction of the elementary emotions of love and passion, only refracted through a prism of exotic exuberance and sensuality.

This also explains the prominence given in the ballet to purely pictorial effects, in scenery, as well as in dancing, which helped to saturate the atmosphere with exotic vapours, and generally stimulated the appeal to the senses, so essential in such a plastic art as dancing. As a reaction against this infatuation with the pictorial style, a movement has lately developed advocating a return to the classical dancing which relies more on the conventional stage symbolism of movement and the professional virtuosity of the performer than on the emotional expressive-

ness and style of the setting. It hardly requires to be pointed out that in this case, as before, we find a strict analogy to the theories of theatricality now advocated on the dramatic stage.

Less notable and still less independent have been the stage developments in the opera, although there have been a number of productions in which interesting attempts have been made to depart from the routine forms of setting and ensemble. The most conspicuous example of originality of staging in the opera has been provided by the production of "Le Coq d'Or," the opera by Rimsky Korsakov, which by the ingenuity of Alexander Benois, an eminent painter and historian of art, was transformed into a fascinating ballet.

It will be remembered that in this production singing was divorced from the actual performers and confined to an immovable chorus placed on two flights of steps on both sides of the stage. Acting, on the other hand, was entrusted to dancers, who illustrated, in plastic forms, the words

and music of their singing counterparts. Many have wondered at the meaning of this division. Was it used merely for the sake of greater efficiency in singing and acting? I doubt it. There were certain features in the production which make it clear that the main idea was to give a grotesque spectacle. Notwithstanding Benois's often-proclaimed opposition to every kind of insincerity on the stage, theatricality is the spirit which pervaded his creation. There was no attempt on his part to disguise the fact that he used an artificial device with the special object of enhancing the scenic effect of the action. Clearly, the expedient had nothing to do with the demands of realism or the style of the plot. It was purely and frankly theatrical. It is another matter how far it was successful.

Allowing for the restrictions imposed on the producer by the form of opera, I think "Le Coq d'Or" fell short of the high mark set up by the producer. No doubt he was impelled by a laudable desire of reviving the method used in the Roman

pantomimes, but this fact could not save him from landing in grave artistic contradictions. Thus we saw the chorus, openly placed on the stage, with the evident object of acting as chorus, lose its independent position as soon as the audience learnt to overlook the discrepancy, and to regard the dancers as the actual singers. If this was the desired effect why was the chorus brought out on the stage at all? Would it not have been much more consistent to hide it out of sight of the audience, as was done in the case of the orchestra, so that the singing should appear as a mere accompaniment to the movements of the dancers, or even as coming direct from the latter? But no, the chorus was on the stage, clearly before our eyes, and yet unable to vindicate itself as a necessary element in the opera. It seems to me that in this undefined and purposeless use of chorus the producer approached a problem of paramount importance. In the Greek theatre, chorus, so long as it was used, served as a link

between the stage and the audience. It disappeared in the later centuries when the stage became entirely detached from the spectator, but during the time of its existence in the Greek theatre it fulfilled the definite function of a connecting link. This function lies in the nature of chorus, and it is a matter of regret that Benois did not venture to face the problem therein involved, instead of which he preferred to go only halfway, satisfied with the extent of originality already achieved and with the indisputable quaintness and poignancy of its effect enhanced, as this was, by the conscious use of grotesque scenery and acting.

There is a wide field in Russia for progress in operatic productions. Almost every big Russian city has an opera house, whilst Petrograd has three and Moscow two. An enterprise which deserves mention in this connection is the Theatre of Musical Drama in Petrograd, distinguished for the extreme thoroughness of its productions and, as far as I can judge, following along the lines explored by the Moscow Art Theatre.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

WITH this, my task of indicating the main lines of development in the modern Russian stage is drawing to a close. It remains only to state afresh the guiding principles which have revealed themselves in the course of this evolution and to try and show their bearing on the general problem of the theatre.

It is commonly believed that it is possible to have such a thing as the Ideal Theatre. All the theatrical reformers will tell you that the improvements they introduce are a step towards its realization. But is this contention borne out by the history of the theatre, which, presumably, should have indicated the lines along which this progress has been taking place? On the contrary, instead of one line of development, leading to a definite goal, we find

at least two main lines and quite a number of secondary ones which all go in different and even opposed directions. I will admit that this is characteristic not only of the theatre, since in every art one can find opposing objects and tendencies. But in my opinion it only proves that there is no such thing as a standard form of art, and therefore my contention that theatrical evolution has revealed no unifying principle remains unimpaired.

However, let the facts speak for themselves. Take the Greek theatre. It originated in actual life (whether in religious ceremonies, or something else, is of no importance in this connection). The actor and the spectator were fused in the same person. But gradually a division set in. The spectator now only looked on and the actor acted. Only the chorus in the orchestra, from which the actor sprang up, remained a spectator and an actor at one and the same time, thus still calling to mind the time when acting had not yet been divorced from life. But the process of

division went on. The chorus disappeared and the audience was left face to face with the actor on the stage. Up to this point the evolution, therefore, was—from acting as a moment in real life, to acting as a spectacle. Both principles involved had their realization in the theatre, and to say that one stood for the true theatre and the other for a false one, is simply beside the point. But the evolution did not stop at this. In the Greek theatre the stage remained a stage and the actors merely *presented* their plays to the audience. The Romans, however, made a further step in dividing the spectator from the actor. The stage building was enlarged, and for the first time an attempt was made to enclose the play within the borders of the stage. In other words, the play was *represented*. Now, who can say that representation was a higher form of the theatre than presentation? They both corresponded to the relationship established between the actor and the spectator, and could anybody show the reason why

it should be standardized? Then, again, we see the principle of presentation carried through the Middle Ages down to our own time, first in the Italian, then in the French and English theatres, varied by the presentation of the mask, as in Italy, or of the character, as in England. Next, in our own age, we see representation revived and passing through various stages.

Here it would be more convenient, for the purposes of illustration, to take the modern Russian theatre.

In the Moscow Art Theatre representation was understood as objective illusionism sought first in the external form, then in the unity of the tone and atmosphere, then in psychological interpretation, and lastly in the moulding of characters, that, remaining realistic, was couched in broad and monumental forms. Throughout all these experiments the stage was regarded as completely detached from the audience, and the world represented was to exist by its own means.

Another form of representation was

suggested by Evereïnov with his monodrama. I called it subjective illusionism because the spectator was desired to feel himself as if he were acting on the stage. But the stage itself remained self-complete and needed no assistance from the spectator in creating the illusion.

Then we come to Meyerhold. He found the traditional theatre developing along the line: theatre-spectacle, representation, objectivism. He started with an opposition to objectivism in representation, replacing it by subjective representation (style, conventionalism, etc.). By so doing he invoked the participation of the spectator and undermined the theatre as a spectacle. We saw the consequence of this in Meyerhold's attempts to realize a theatre of action, that is, a theatre in which all are actors. The first period of Meyerhold's work can therefore be described as aiming at representation, more in imagination than in reality, of a certain vision of the world, in which representation the audience takes active part and thus

tends to form a theatre of action. The obstacles met with in carrying out this idea led to a reversion of the object itself. Since it was found difficult to transform a performance into an episode of real life, the idea presented itself to the producer to try the opposite effect, *i.e.* to transform an episode of real life into a performance. "Here in the theatre," it was said, "we are spectators and actors. Let us admit this fact and make the best of it." So theatricality was proclaimed and with it the theatre once again returned to the principle of presentation.

To sum up, then, it may be asked which of these principles provides the means whereby the ideal theatre could be realized? My answer is: none, or all. It all depends upon what we look for in the theatre. Demands vary with the time, and the only safe criterion rests with the demands of the modern man, the attitude of our own time. As between the theatre of action and the theatre-spectacle the choice which the modern man would make

is pretty certain. We have grown too critical and too self-conscious to surrender ourselves willingly to the ministrations of actors and authors, no matter how profound or how clever they may be. Our way of living may be good or bad, but we are not likely to ask the actor that *he* should fashion it for ourselves. This privilege has been granted only to politicians, perhaps, on the principle: "Leave our souls in peace and devil take the hindmost." This, of course, would not apply to the members of some order of "The Blue Moon," or "The Square Circle," or the initiates of some esoteric brotherhood of "Smiling Osiris," who would joyfully acquiesce in all the tasks that the theatrical ingenuity of their sublime masters might impose on them. They would simply be asking for it. But I deal with ordinary mortals, and these, I believe, would most vigorously resent any attempt on the part of the theatre at meddling with their lives. Though by no means all of us are great thinkers, we form in the theatre a com-

munity of sages looking at, and listening to, what the wise men of the impersonating profession are able to show us. I am sure that, for our part, most of us could show those impersonators many a mystery and trick in our own humble vocations.

If, then, the theatre-spectacle is what the modern man wants, in which form should it be given him? Representation or presentation? This, some people believe, is the question. No question at all. If a thing is *represented* well, it gives me pleasure to see what it is and how it was reproduced on the stage. If it is *presented* well, I am pleased none the less. The whole point is in the right use of the medium, which is tantamount to saying that the form must be adequate to the subject, and both must carry conviction. Naturalism in the external form will not appeal to me because my intellect is sufficiently trained to see that it is no more than ankle-deep. But give me the feeling of a reality existing independently of, and detached from, me as a spectator, and I may contemplate it with all the

enthusiasm which it is worth. Or again, if you attempt to represent a thing that does not admit of complete materialization on the stage, I am prepared to lend you the aid of my imagination and fly with you to the far-away realms wherein symbolic realities or mere Platonic ideas abide. Be only careful to do your part really well since to drop down from the dizzy altitude of a couple of feet is a most distressing spectacle.

Lastly, you want to be in a theatre, as at home—to show how exceedingly clever you are at your craft, and how wonderful is the world hidden in every line of your body, every intonation of your voice, every “mask” you create—and I am with you as wholeheartedly now as I was before. Even more so, as a multiplicity of worlds, reduced to their elementary forms, is more appealing and more instructive to me than the complete unity of single worlds, which engaged your mind in the work of representation.

And there it is. Let the theatre bring

out all the possibilities of art latent in it, and the future will not begrudge them recognition. They all tend to the realization of the Ideal Theatre—each in its own way, pursuing its own ideal.¹

¹ The following Russian books were consulted in the composition of the above essay:

- B. VARNEKE. *Istoria Russkavo Teatra* (two parts).
 MOSKOVSKY KHUDOZBESTVENNY TEATR. *Izдание zhurnala, "Rampa i Zhizn."*
 V. MEYERHOLD. *O Teatre.*
 N. EVREÏNOV. *Teatr, kak takovoy.*
 ,, *Vvedenie v monodramu.*
 ,, *Teatr dlia sebia (Part I.).*

VIACHESLAV IVANOV

VIACHESLAV IVANOV

A POET-PHILOSOPHER OF MODERN RUSSIA

To the outside observer Russia always seems to partake of the nature of the Sphinx—she presents a baffling, problematic combination of elements, simple and familiar in themselves, yet always resulting in strange and unintelligible effects. The uninitiated European could read but one answer to the riddle. "Russia," he has said with an air of finality, as though disposing of the problem to his complete satisfaction, "Russia is properly a country of the East—the remote, intangible East, enshrouded in impenetrable veils of obscurity and mystery, standing always for something dim, inscrutable, and wholly incomprehensible, for certain peculiar modes of thought that defy translation into the clear, rational forms of the Western intellect."

And not only the European but the Russian himself, in his recurring moods of intense self-realization, has been too ready to insist on the essential difference, the definite line of demarcation, which separates the Russian spirit from that of the Western world.

Yet the problem of the Russian soul as stated in these terms betrays, on the one hand, a lack of memory and, on the other, a faulty logic. Two important facts seem to be little appreciated, even when they are not completely lost sight of. The modern European, a product of the commercial and industrial developments of the last few centuries, is too preoccupied with the Present to pay much attention to the Past. If he cared to probe somewhat deeper than usual into the spiritual worlds of ancient Greece and Egypt, upon whose labours our modern civilization so firmly rests, he would, perhaps, be as much startled by the "Eastern" aspect of their primordial wisdom as he is to-day when dealing with

the problem of Russia. On the other hand, remote as Russia is from modern Europe—as remote as the middle ages are from our own time—she is now making rapid strides to bring herself into line with the rest of the civilized world—that is to complete the process of industrialization which will ultimately leave her as devoid of her present wrappings of mysticism as it left Germany of her erstwhile “ national ” romanticism. The mysticism of Russian thought is nothing but a certain process of continued introspection carried into the deepest recesses of the human spirit. The prevalence of this contemplative mood, which has been caused by the reaction of certain economic and political conditions upon different classes of the Russian nation, has made this feature a kind of national characteristic. But it is after all merely a question of quantity or number and not of quality or essence. We have only to consider the personality and teaching of Friedrich Nietzsche, perhaps one of the most remarkable spiritual phenomena in

the history of the Western world, to be led to the conviction that whatever the accumulated riches of Western culture may be (and Nietzsche symbolized in himself the distinctive features of the West as few thinkers have) there does not exist any real obstacle which could hide the mysteries of human personality from the patient researches of an earnest intellect. Thus the peculiar significance of the Russian mind, with all its inherited wealth of spiritual experience and vicissitude, garnered from the ancient world by Byzantine Christianity, is not impenetrable to the observer provided he has succeeded in overcoming the shallow rationalism of our own time. One thing Russia can justly claim to her credit. In the moral and intellectual struggles of her sons she agonizes for the rest of the world. This vicarious suffering is not so much the virtue of Russia as it is the shortcoming of the other nations, who have sacrificed their spiritual birthright on the altar of commercialism. And for this reason, if for no other, the Western world

would receive a new and vital stimulus if it followed more closely and with a greater sympathy the spiritual life of the Russian people.

It is sufficient to refer to Russian literature to be instantly impressed by the fervent spirit which pervades most of its standard creations. In the works of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky the eternal problems of life are formulated with such a broadness of vision, and faced with such boldness, that even the sceptical West has been compelled to recognize in them a new spiritual force carrying a message of profound significance and opening new, heretofore unfamiliar, vistas of the world. A greater acquaintance with the past and present of Russian thought would reveal to the modern European that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky by no means exhaust the wells of Russian intellectual activity. Towering nearly as high as these two, though in a realm different from theirs, there stands the original figure of Vladimir Soloviev, the poet, the visionary, and the philosopher of

exceptional acumen, and following in his footsteps is seen the group of younger writers, all eager questioners of the mysteries of life, amongst whom Merezhkovsky, Rozanov, and Ivanov stand out as the most gifted and the most arresting. Whatever our attitude toward religion and mysticism may be, it is impossible to deny that this group of authors has made clear to us some new aspects of the world, of which before we had been but dimly conscious.

Selecting Viacheslav Ivanov for the subject of the present essay, I do so not only for reasons of personal sympathy, but also because, in my opinion, he is a typical and, at the same time, original representative of modern intellectual Russia.

Ivanov is a poet and a thinker, who embodies his profound revelations in a form that is austere and majestic and yet instinct with a singularly intimate and compelling beauty. His genius is generally known only to the elect, for the involved and archaic form he affects in his poetry,

and the depth of his thought render him virtually unintelligible to the multitude. Of all the devotees of Symbolism in Russia he is the most interesting and perhaps the most important, since in his poems and essays he has created new values and opened a vista of new realities.

Realities or "*realiora*," as he prefers to call them—the eternal absolutes of human life—these are the objects of his poetic vision. Need we argue with him as to whether these absolutes do actually exist, or whether they are merely the creations of a self-confident mind, projected upon the world of its own thought? The distinction is not essential. Whether they exist or not, one thing is beyond doubt: they are absolutes for the human mind—human absolutes, so to speak—realities of which we are profoundly conscious whenever we venture to peer into the innermost depths of our own soul. A thousand generations have experienced and proclaimed them. To the human mind they seem to partake of a reality kindred with

Time and Space. Within the circumscribed limits of our understanding we cannot help seeing the universe presented in their terms, resolved into them, as it were, as we see it resolved into the terms of space and time. So let us not question the poet and the visionary on the ground of "fact"—for the essential fact lies in the message. But what is the message of Ivanov? To give an adequate idea of his teaching would not be possible within the scope of a short essay, so that I must confine myself to stating fundamental principles.

Through the medium of Ivanov's philosophy the world is seen as the resultant of two opposing principles, which have been slowly evolving themselves in the cosmic development of the Universe. As I am trying to penetrate their nature a grand and startling picture is revealed to my imagination.

It seems as though the flood of time rolls back and we hear once more the vast and ever-growing sound of wonder which was

thrilling the Earth in her dreamy rotation round the central body of the nebula, which enveloped her like a veil. Once again we seem to perceive the dramatic moment when the veil was rent and the awakened Earth stood revealed, resplendent in her garment of light. She gazed in awe upon the glowing mass of the Sun, hardly distinguished yet, for it was little more radiant than herself, and from her bewildered soul burst forth a sound—a single word which she was just learning to utter, a word which resounded and trembled to the uttermost depths of space—"Thou." "Thou"—she repeated, gazing spell-bound at her mother-Sun, unable as yet to grasp the full significance of her new position. Then the truth rushed in upon her—then she felt how intolerable was the burden of separate existence, how overwhelming the consciousness of her identity, and she would fain have withdrawn again into the bosom of her mother to swoon and lose herself once more in the languid, boundless whole.

In the same way it seems as though we can hear the eternal "Thou" as it is uttered in one grand, swelling harmony by all the myriads of cosmic intelligences, who, springing into existence, stand aghast at finding themselves so suddenly separated from the world by an abysmal and impassable gulf. And then, as the ages rolled on, Man appeared, and he, too, gazed in a great wonder at the world, repeating the awful syllable "Thou," crying it to the soft, sweet Earth, to the near, dim Moon, to the distant, brilliant Sun, and to the whole of the majestic Universe, which he feared and loved and worshipped, praying and seeking in agony of spirit the unattainable boon of oblivion—of merging his finite being into the infinite life of the One, as the raindrop melts into the shining sea. But in spite of this insatiable longing, this unceasing prayer, Man found the gulf growing ever wider and deeper, until in the process of time there came another change. By slow degrees he became conscious of some deep and thrilling music

rising within him. He closed his eyes to the world and turned them in upon himself, listening enthralled to this strange and unknown rhythm of the soul. Suddenly a cry of unspeakable joy burst from his bosom. "I," shouted the Man in rapture, "I am!"—"Thou, the Sun, Universe, God—Thou hast existed from all time—now I am born—I stand before Thee—an equal—no longer shall my head bow in terror before Thee—I fear Thee not—I am free!" And so Man challenged the Universe and measured his strength against it. But again and again would the power of his pride faint within him and he would taste the bitterness of failure and defeat.

Woman was his companion in life, and to her the wild strugglings and longings of his spirit seemed strange and alien. She found herself unable to join him in his revolt, for she was not yet entirely severed from the Earth, from the sublime sweep of its movements which throbbed and palpitated through every particle of her being. By her proximity to Man she was able partially

to sway and conquer his mind, and to communicate to him the stream of universal life which flowed through her. Thus Man at times would relinquish the independence he had won in asserting the power of his "I," in order to submit to the omnipotent and all-embracing "Thou." But again and again has he returned to the strife, creating new and ingenious fortifications, building higher and more powerful barriers, but the "Thou" has always followed close upon him, and the most he could do was to delay and postpone his inevitable defeat.

It is thus that I picture the general meaning and evolution of the fundamental principles which Ivanov sees as the basis of life. Perhaps this visual conception of their revealment somewhat reflects my own sympathy with man's struggle for self-assertion, which is rather antagonistic to Ivanov's ideas. But apart from this subjective valuation the principles themselves have been set out as they are conceived by Ivanov. Expressing them in a less allegorical form, I may say that Ivanov starts

from the antithesis of unity and multiplicity, Nature and Man, "Thou and I," which he symbolises in the Greek myths of Apollo and Dionysus. Nietzsche was the first to indicate the importance of the distinction between these two deities, which in its application to art he defined as "the two art-worlds of dreamland and drunkenness." Ivanov, however, takes the antithesis as the basis for the whole of his system, reducing it on the one side to its first principles, and amplifying it on the other with all the wealth of human experience which was gained through and in Christianity. Apollo for him is not only god of dreamland, but a god personifying the power of contemplative vision in memory. Through memory we affirm ourselves. Through memory which retains for us the image of the eternal past, the life of humanity and the Universe, we are able to contemplate the world in general, and works of art in particular, as distinct and external verities. Through memory we can compare and distinguish, dramatize and

expand, until our hearts throb with the heart-beats of the Eternal, and our minds respond to the infinite and harmonious rhythm and measure of the world. Thus in Apollo we exalt our microcosm to the Olympic attitude of contemplation, where it is able to embrace and absorb, partially at least, the immeasurable expanses of the macrocosm. Developing Ivanov's conception of Apollo, we can, however, come to an even higher form of the Apollonian principle. "Individuation"—humanity—our temporary independence and segregation from the life of the Cosmos—regarded, as it is by so many thinkers as something altogether imaginary and deceptive—reveals, from the Apollonian standpoint, its primordial significance and eternal value. "The human" is that peculiar expression of Being which we have won for ourselves during our incessant struggle to emerge from the oblivion of the all-gulping Universe. Shall we lightly relinquish this priceless boon? Shall we not rather strive with all the power of knowledge and understanding

to grapple to our souls these "shadows" and "shells" of the Realities which we are thought to be? Thus the human microcosm becomes the highest form of conscious reality, not only because it is a miraculous identity through which even the chaos of the Inane and the Unknown finds form and law, but also because it is "ours," because it is "human."

But if my personal sympathies rest entirely with Apollo, such is not the attitude of Ivanov. Apollonian as of necessity he is, his vision is nevertheless strained to pierce the mysterious impenetrability of the Dionysian world. Like Nietzsche he is captivated by its spontaneity, by its intoxication, by the orgiastic ecstasy and fundamental actuality of its manifestations. But he goes further. Beyond the exaltation, the fierce elemental transport of its joys, he sees the tragic face of Reality itself. Here is waged the eternal strife of Becoming and Being. The world seems to suffer from its very identity. Aflame with an insatiable desire, it yearns for destruction, sacri-

fice, pain, all the terror and madness of existence in order the better to feel the dual nature of its being, to feel that it is and that it is not, to taste at the same time of life and death, of existence and non-existence, of consciousness and oblivion. And when the inevitable moment comes, and the enraptured world abandons itself to the last abnegation, though destroyed it rises again, athirst for life and beauty and love. Thus the face of Dionysus, the tragic god of suffering, sacrifice, and resurrection is ever revealed in the heart of the world.

Such is Ivanov's conception of Dionysus. In his monograph on "The Hellenic Religion of the Suffering God," he tries to prove that such was the conception of the ancient Greeks—a contention which is greatly at variance with the prevailing view, shared even by Nietzsche, of the uniform, harmonious nature of Dionysus. Ivanov, however, does not stop here. He develops his principle one stage further, arriving at a conclusion which may appear at first sight particularly startling. He sees

Dionysus as Christ. Here the Pagan and Christian philosophies are reconciled. Unexpected as this conclusion may appear, it is neither arbitrary nor baseless. There are many different aspects of Christ, and at least one of them—that of the Catholic religion, sanctifying and deifying the flesh, the materia—has many points in common with the conception of Ivanov. The common elements of suffering, sacrifice, and resurrection, indicate further points of similarity between Christ and Dionysus. It is true that such a conception of Christ lacks many of the human attributes which are usually associated with him. But for Ivanov there is nothing divine in the human which is only illusionary and relative. God to him is the Dionysus of suffering and love. But Christ is the God of suffering and love. It follows then that Christ is Dionysus.

But however enamoured Ivanov appears to be of the tragic mask of Dionysus, he is not entirely under its dominion. He has listened too much and too long to the

enchanting wisdom of Apollo, to be able to surrender himself entirely to the oblivion and the bottomless abysses of the Dionysian chaos. He is ever peering into their depths, with his eyes fixed upon their innermost mysteries, and yet what he sees is not the real orgiastic chaos of elements, but only a reflection of it in the Apollonian mirror.

This mirror may be conceived as having two distinct forms. The one is colourless and bright, and reflects only the world of external forms, transparent and unsubstantial, as though the qualities had been abstracted and only the proportions left. The other is sombre in colour, and the world which it reflects is also transparent, but heavy and metallic, resounding faintly like the low melodious singing of silver—the muffled voice of Reality. It is in the revelations of the dark mirror that Ivanov sees the Dionysian world. There he sees the face of the world's tragedy, upon which, to use his own metaphor, no man may look with naked vision and escape the fate of Eurypylus, who was overwhelmed with

madness after he had gazed upon the awful image of Dionysus in the ark, which he received from Cassandra as his share of the spoils after the siege of Troy. Thus it is through the purifying medium of Apollo that Ivanov can look upon the horror of Dionysus, and likewise it is to Apollo that he chiefly owes his wonderful poetry, the exquisite perfection, balance, and form of his hymns in honour of Dionysus. These classical poems, conforming so strictly to the highest canons of Apollonian art, could never have been inspired alone by the vehement and terrible self-abandon of Dionysus. And if I have to conclude this note with a definite verdict, will it not be just to infer that, in the case of the personality and teaching of Ivanov, both these great deities have an equal claim to recognition? As with Ivanov, so with humanity, Apollo and Dionysus are mutually interdependent and co-eternal. They are the two primordial forces whose resultant is Existence, and through their boundless activities and interactions,

through the birth of suns and planets, the rise and fall of empires and civilizations, through all the joys and sorrows, the glory and shame, the triumph and despair of life, the soul of Man is slowly evolving and perfecting itself. Who then shall judge between these two great principles—the gods of negation and affirmation; the unhuman and the human; Dionysus and Apollo?

LIVING SPACE AND THE
THEATRE

LIVING SPACE AND THE THEATRE

I

CONSULTING THE CYCLOPS AND THE ELEPHANT ON PROBLEMS OF ART

THERE is a curious Russian expression : "smotrí v-óba," *i.e.* "look out with both eyes," and another : "vosmí glazá v-roóki," *i.e.* "take your eyes in your hands." They both look simple enough, and such they really are when used in popular speech. But their apparent simplicity conceals a depth of wisdom that far transcends their usual meaning. Indeed, how often do we realize what it means to look with both eyes? Would the world appear the same if we, like the fabulous Cyclops, had only one eye? Or again, would the things around us look different if we carried our eyes in our hands,

just as some species of fish which have their visual organs at the end of long tentacles?

These are no idle speculations for the lover of curiosities and riddles. They deal with the fundamental problems of space, which most people either overlook, or ignore. It will, therefore, be not altogether useless to try and disclose the hidden significance of these questions, and all the more so, as the results of our inquiry will enable us to throw some light on the complicated problem of space in the theatre.

Most people talk of space as if it were nothing but a combination of properties governed by the formulæ of Euclid. They know that there are planes and volumes, or, as the more learned amongst them would put it, planes have two dimensions and volumes three, and having understood as much, they are content to leave the matter in the hands of those who are supposed to know all about it. These, doubtless, do know a great deal. The

mathematician, for instance, may explain that besides the space of Euclid there are the spaces of Lobachevsky and Riman, in which the sum of the angles of a triangle can be more than two right angles or less, and parallel lines can meet; though he may also add that, after all, it matters very little, and we can go about our business just as before without fear of running into the man to whom we owe money, at the end of the street, should we perchance be walking on the one side of it and he on the other; provided, of course, that we take sufficient care not to catch his eye. And many other interesting things the mathematician could tell us. Nor would the philosopher be less instructive. From him we would hear many exciting theories about what space actually is: whether it is an independent reality, or a form of thought, or a mere sensation developed in man during the endless process of evolution. The physiologist, for his part, may enlarge on the construction and working of the

eye, remarking, perhaps, as Helmholtz did, that if this apparatus had been produced by an optician, the purchaser would be justified in immediately returning it to the maker and even using strong language. As to the joint working of the two-eye-system, he may say that the scientists themselves have yet been unable to agree on its explanation. At any rate, there are some who maintain that we see all objects double, except the one we fix with our eyes. If we are not aware of the fact, it only proves how absent-minded we are.

However, with all their interesting theories, none of these learned men will ever tell us one thing: that is, how we actually feel space and how it affects our experience of the world. It is only when we turn to the ancient thinkers, such, for instance, as Pythagoras, that we see men, for whom space was not a mere abstract idea, but a living reality eternally present before the human consciousness and impressing itself upon man with all the multitude of its forms.

Of the people who actually feel space, who respond to every form it assumes, who may be said to breathe with their eyes, we should expect the artists to possess a greater knowledge of its nature than is granted to anybody else. But here we have a case of peculiar professional blindness. The painter sees the world differently from the sculptor ; the sculptor differently from the architect ; the architect differently from both the others ; and none of them seem to be able to embrace the visible world in all its entirety.

On more than one occasion I have heard painters say that they cannot bear to look in a stereoscope : the sight of innumerable planes was repugnant to their artistic feeling. And I can well understand them. Sensitive to the nature of their medium, they have completely submitted to the form of visual perception it has imposed upon them, and so the flat surface of a painting has become for them the only form of space worth noticing. It is true, the history of painting knows of

numerous attempts at mastering the effect of depth and even the stereoscopic effect of space. The artists, bent on representing objects as we ordinarily see them, tried every means at their disposal to create the impression of things standing out from their background. In this they often succeeded, but, alas! at the price of sacrificing the picture as an independent entity. For two distinct moments are involved in the representation of stereoscopic space: the moment of realism, of faithful reproduction in portraying the world around us, which, as a principle, has no absolute artistic significance, either in the positive or the negative sense; and the moment of discontinuity, of breaking up space into innumerable planes, which, on the contrary, has the most decisive bearing on the artistic use of a medium both as regards the formal nature of the latter, and the inner meaning which the ideas conceived in terms of space must of necessity carry.

Continuity and discontinuity of space



—these are the two fundamental forms of man's perception which stand for two distinct kinds of human experience and symbolize two opposite conceptions of the world.

A concrete example will help to illustrate this statement. Without touching here upon the theory of vision, let us imagine for the moment that through some unfortunate accident we are able to see with one eye only. Those who have had this unpleasant experience will agree that in this "monocular" position our sensation of space will differ materially from the ordinary one. We shall find, for instance, that our sense of distance has become considerably weakened, whilst surrounding objects will seem to fuse into one continuous mass. If we took two long pencils and held them freely at arm's length, their points would show a somewhat persistent tendency to frustrate any efforts in bringing them together. But probably the most striking experience of all we should get on

venturing out into the street in the dusk or evening, when subdued light would no longer help us in judging distance by the contrasts of illumination. There, as we walk, we should suddenly discover that the street itself moves straight against us, with its houses, railings, and passers-by flowing in one incessant stream and suddenly growing in size the moment we approach them, and with the lamp-posts, in particular, springing up before our eyes when we least expect them. Speaking from personal experience, I may say that this sensation of continuity is not in the least amusing. Rather is it apt to depress our mind by the feeling of loss of individuality, which overtakes us amidst the numberless objects clinging to us on all sides, giving no elbow-room for free movement, drawing us in to dissolve and merge in their inane mass.

What a relief it is after this experience to be able to see with both eyes ! It seems as if the spirit of reason has suddenly descended upon the weltering chaos. At once we feel

that we are no longer a part of an indefinite and unwieldy conglomeration of objects, but stand opposed to them all—independent individualities and masters of our movements and actions. Moreover, the things we see, begin to tear themselves off from the background which has been enveloping them, and step forward, each by itself, each distinct from the others, and holding its own place. Their clear-cut masses, so unlike their former vague and shapeless contours, make us feel measure and rhythm in the world, revealing the power of discontinuity as the formative principle of reality.

There is, however, a definite limit placed on the power of our vision in shaping and individualizing the ambience. Whilst marking a circle round ourselves in our position of beholders, and singling out likewise the objects in our immediate vicinity, the binocular mechanism of our vision fails to break up the continuity of the objects lying farther away. The experiments carried out by the physiolo-

gists, have determined the boundaries of the sphere within which our sight is capable of the stereoscopic effect. The radius of this sphere has been calculated at about 500 yards. Beyond it there begins the region of the monocular vision, since the distance dividing the eyes of man is too small to form the angle sufficient for breaking up the fused planes of the more distant objects.

In this respect the bigger animals, such as the elephant, must be considered more fortunate. They seem to possess the visual apparatus which should enable them to carry the individualizing power of discontinuity to the extent greatly surpassing the capacity of the human eyesight. It has always puzzled me to find out how these big animals see the surrounding world. Are they more inclined to the asserting of their individuality than are the smaller animals? Does the greater clearness of form which the objects must assume in their vision, help them only in sighting their friends and enemies, or does

their individual detachment make them feel lost and lonesome, since much greater spiritual powers are needed for rejoicing in one's isolation, than are granted even to the wisest animals? Naturally, I could never answer these questions. But while pondering over them, I came upon the idea of an optical device, which seemed to bring me nearer to their solution. At the time (this happened some eight years back) I was greatly pleased with my invention and speculated joyfully on the results its application would bring in a number of important problems. To my disappointment, however, I soon discovered that I had been anticipated in this by no less a man than Helmholtz who, as long ago as 1857, had designed an apparatus on exactly the same lines as mine. So, not without regret, I must concede the priority to Helmholtz's "telestereoscope" (as he christened his device), and will make use of his invention to illustrate my argument. As to the application of the stereoscopic principle in the

wider field of sciences, alas! it was not I who discovered the planetoid "Stereoscopia!"

I have quoted the Russian expression: "Take your eyes in your hands." With the help of the tele-stereoscope we are actually enabled to do so. In this apparatus the difficulty in having our eyes spaced so closely together, is overcome by the use of four mirrors, two facing the eyes, and two sliding in a frame and facing the object to be seen. By means of this arrangement the angle, at which we see the object, can be increased to any size desirable, and, as a result, the power of seeing things stereoscopically is extended to the farthest limits open to our vision.

I need not dwell again on the startling experience of observing the world split up into innumerable independent entities. Nor do I claim for the binocular mechanism of our sight that it is the only factor in forming our perceptions of continuity and discontinuity in the world. These are rooted in the very depth of our nature

and continually reveal themselves in a number of ways. Of far greater importance to my mind is the fundamental unity of our perceptions of space with the wider experiences formed within our spirit in the process of its crystalization. In a number of arts, which includes the theatre, space forms the medium by means of which the artist conveys his conceptions to the observer. Is it not essential, for this reason, to keep clearly in mind the exact nature of the properties with which we are dealing, and to realize to the fullest extent their inner significance? The problem of painting, for instance, would be greatly simplified were it always understood that the stereoscopic effect in a picture makes us see not the picture as a whole but as many separate objects represented, whilst at the same time compelling us to wrestle with the perception of the picture's flat surface, which is forced on us by our looking at it with both eyes. Again, linear and atmospheric perspective, as well as relief

obtained by chiaroscuro, do not disrupt the unity of a painting, even when this is viewed at a close distance, if they are kept within reasonable limits. On the other hand, the artist's attempt at suggesting depth becomes purposeless when the painting is fixed permanently at a distance lying on the border of binocular vision, since in that case all the objects seen, including the painting, will be drowned in one continuous space. The fact to be always borne in mind in considering problems of art is the relationship established between the work viewed and the beholder. In this relationship the perceptions of space obtained by the latter play the leading part, and by the sympathetic influence they exercise on the kindred experiences rooted even more deeply in our psychic, instantly and firmly fashion our attitude towards the object before us.

Raising the problem above its particular form, as expressed in terms of space, let us inquire into the forms of relationship

possible between man and a work of visual art.

At the outset we can distinguish two basic attitudes on the part of man. He may either be engaged in creating the work, or he may observe it from the outside. So long as his creative activity is spontaneous, his work is only a part of himself, or, in other words, the artist and the work are one. But the moment he stops and takes a view of the product of his exertions, he detaches it from his own personality and sees it possessed of independent life. Every man combines in himself both the actor and the beholder, with this qualification that in the professional artist the predominant role belongs to the actor, whilst in the "professional" spectator it belongs to the beholder in him. I will venture to state here, without sustaining it by argument, that art as art exists only for the beholder, whether he be the artist or the spectator, which is tantamount to saying that the work of art ceases to be "of art" as soon

as it is no longer felt as distinct from, and opposed to, the personality of the man who comes in contact with it. Whether it be the physical or the mental eye that we turn on the work, turn it we must to be justified in using the term "art." And with this we find the moment of discontinuity introduced again in our argument.

So far we have established two mutually opposed entities: the beholder and the work of art. But the latter need not be a complete unity. Behind the barrier which invests it with its artistic nature and singles it out as an independent verity, there may exist forms that are conflicting and disrupted, provided they remain within the boundaries marked by the original division from the beholder. Being a reality, that is a world in itself, the work of art may speak either by the voice of its own material, or by copying the voices of other materials. In the first case the statement embodied in the work will be *presented* to the observer,

in the second *represented*. But no exact parallelism exists between these two forms of statement, and the moments of continuity and discontinuity. The preponderance of the one or the other of these two moments depends entirely upon the nature of the medium, and that of the subject stated. The important fact to be noticed is that the picture of a world placed before the spectator may be either continuous or discontinuous, and is therefore capable of evoking two opposite groups of experiences: one standing for spontaneity, religious ecstasy and devotion, the sense of cosmic unity, and emotions of similar character, which tend to create the feeling of a monistic world fused into one integral whole; and the other group of experiences which stand for clear-consciousness, the sense of differentiation and individuality, the distinctness of form and the aloofness of the observing personality from the ambience, and cause the perception of an atomistic world, a world of numberless centred units standing

mutually opposed and asserting themselves against each other.

It may appear to the reader that the abstract character of the above definitions renders them practically pointless when applied to concrete phenomena of art. I hope, however, that the following analysis of the various forms which have been revealed to us in the history of the theatre will show that it is not so. It is surprising indeed to observe how the forms of theatre architecture and the stage have been continuously adapting themselves to changes in the attitude of the spectator towards the performance. Elsewhere I have shown the dependence of these forms on the use of the methods of presentation and representation. It is necessary now to examine them in the light of the broader principle of continuity and discontinuity.

II

THE SPECTATOR SITTING IN JUDGMENT

THE history of the theatre presents no uniform development of any definite principle. In different countries and in different periods the theatre swayed from one form to another, sometimes creating new methods, sometimes repeating what had been done before. For this reason it would be a vain attempt to try and trace the bearing on the theatre of the principles of continuity and discontinuity, if in reviewing the various forms of the theatre I faithfully followed the chronological order of their origin. A better plan suggests itself to me of grouping the historical data according to the principle which they illustrate.

As it happens, the initial stages of the history of the theatre provide the most perfect example of the significance of the principle of continuity, and thus enable

me to follow to some extent the historical order of theatrical forms.

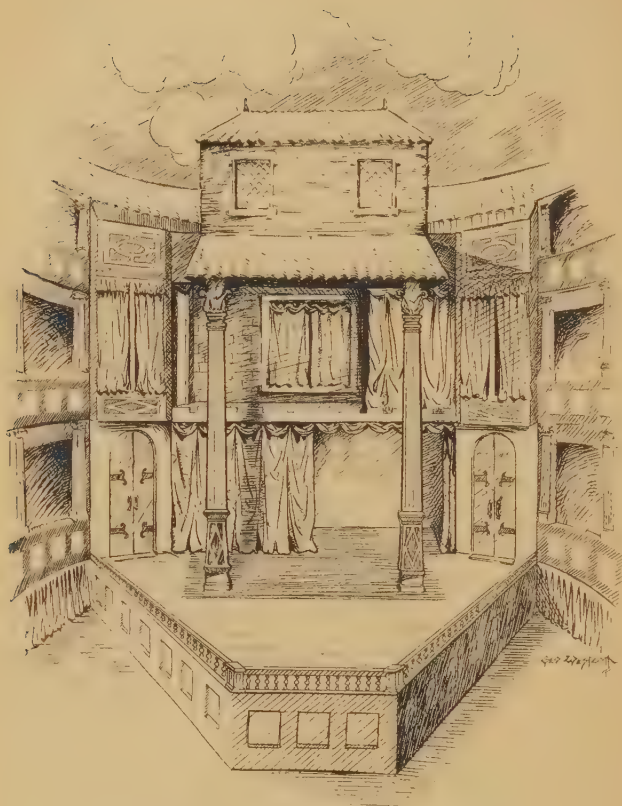
If we define the nature of the theatre as performance in action, expressing a certain sentiment or idea in forms whose significance is fixed by an accepted convention, we shall have to start the history of the theatre from a somewhat later stage than that usually taken. Indeed, what was there of the theatrical nature in the spontaneous outbursts of feeling, which accompanied the early religious and popular festivals, so long as they remained haphazard and personal, and carried no meaning to anybody but the performer himself? One would be as much justified in calling theatrical the "performance" of a lover in the outburst of passion, or of a praying man kneeling before a holy image. Obviously, "performing" must be distinguished from other activities of life by something that is peculiar to itself, and this peculiarity is its *form*. So only when the *form of performing* became detached from the

usual expressions of living activity, and acquired a significance of its own, may it be said that the art of the theatre came into being.

In this stage it made itself apparent in the public life of Greece, in the various public ceremonies in which a special symbolical meaning was attached to the ritual. But the moment of *performing* was particularly marked in the annual festivals of Dionysus and, owing to their popularity and importance, it was soon able to develop into their most prominent feature. The popular procession with which these festivals usually began, and the preponderating position of the chorus in the early performances, helped to link together the actor and the spectator in one body of participants in the religious ceremony. The dialogue between the chorus and its leader was not a thing outside the actual life of the audience, but formed a part of that life. There was no question of presenting or representing a story. The story was simply acted as something real

in itself, just as the marriage ceremony, whatever rites or even acted scenes may accompany it, always remains a fact of real life, and never a spectacle, a show.

So, in the early Greek performances we have a form of the theatre in which the identity of the performance with real life established a unity between the audience and the performance. Two moments characterized this unity. The moment of reality, or objectivity, expressed in the participation of the audience in the performance; and the moment of action, as opposed to observation, which not only contributed to the unity of the audience and the performance, but also tended to unite all the performers and the actual surroundings into one continuous whole. On the other hand, the fact must not be lost sight of that at that stage of the Greek theatre, acting, as such, was always subordinate to the nature of the ceremony, and by its own power was capable only of a slight influence on the forms of relationship established amongst



A TYPICAL SHAKESPEARIAN STAGE.

[Reconstruction by V. E. ALBR

the participants of the performance. For this reason, it would be wrong to lay great stress on the visual impressions of unity, as other factors must have played a much more determining part. Only in the instances, in which acting led to a state of general ecstasy, as it did in the orgiastic rituals performed at the Eleusinian Mysteries, the wild self-abandonment of those acting, and the sense of unity with elemental nature which it created, must, doubtless, have been accompanied by, and partly due to, a greatly weakened perception of form in space. It must be borne in mind that the discontinuous effect of binocular vision, as well as the power of seeing things clearly, is possible only when our eyes are converged on a definite object. Whereas in a state of excitement man naturally gazes straight ahead, and, therefore, gains the sensation of an unbroken flow of space in which all objects merge diffused and formless.

Another form of unity between the audience and the performance developed

during the next, the classical period of the Greek theatre. The change was brought about by the construction of an amphitheatre around the orchestra, which had an immediate effect of introducing division in the ranks of those who took part in the festival. The chorus, and the actors who soon evolved from its midst, became the only actual performers, whilst the part of the audience was confined to the position of mere passive observers. As the theatrical performances were losing their religious character, the tie which bound together the audience and the performers in the fact of actual life, became ever weaker, and eventually disappeared entirely, having given place to a new and different form of unity. The reality of religious life was superseded by the reality of theatrical life, which was impressed upon the minds both of the audience and the performers by the very character of the Greek theatre-building.

Let us examine more closely the relationships between the performer and the

spectator which were thus formed. Taking the performance as a whole, we find that the Greek theatre knew no opposition between the real world in which was the audience whilst in the theatre, and the world of the play produced. The latter world was *presented* to the public in the terms of the former. The method of the Greek staging is usually described as conventional. This conventionalism, however, was of a specific nature. It was determined not so much by the subject of the plays produced, as by the method of theatrical presentation. Simplification and "stylisation" as methods of interpreting plays were unknown in the Greek theatre. The only conventions, imposed by the subject, may be found in such devices as the use of cathurnae in order to distinguish gods and heroes from personages of lower ranks, and of certain symbolical attributes which always accompanied certain characters, though even these may be looked upon as greatly determined by the method of

presentation. The more fundamental conventions of the Greek stage must be ascribed entirely to this latter method. The use of masks, the restricted number of actors, the architectural scenery and the curious device of "ekkyklema" were all due to the peculiar nature of the Greek theatre. Nothing, perhaps, proves this so clearly as the last mentioned device. In complete agreement with the architectural unity between the stage and the rest of the theatre, the Greeks never attempted to represent the interior of a building. The action on the stage was always set outside some palace or temple, or in rural scenery. But the plots of some plays demanded a setting inside the building, and this difficulty was overcome by means of the "ekkyklema." A platform was rolled out through the central door in the background, and arranged on it was the scene supposed to have taken place within the walls of the building painted on the panels. The actors on the ekkyklema stood in fixed poses, for example, in a scene

of murder, as this is done in the modern *tableaux vivants*, and having displayed the picture, came down on to the stage to continue the play.

The extreme conventionality of the ekkyklema stands in such a striking contrast to the modern ideas of realistic representation that some scholars have been led to deny its very existence in the Greek theatre, contending that a device, so crude and unnatural, could not have possibly been tolerated by the refined Attic audience. It seems to me, however, that nothing could conform so naturally and so artistically to the Greek notion of the theatre, as this "crude" method of frank theatricality.

It establishes beyond doubt the feature which, in the case of the mask and other Greek conventions, admits of more plausible explaining away on the ground of realistic considerations. The cumulative evidence of these conventional methods, viewed in the light of the relationship between the audience and the per-

formance as a whole, proves most conclusively that the Greeks recognized no other form of producing plays except that of presentation.

A few remarks on the architecture of the Greek theatre will help to bring out some further important features of the ancient drama.

There are many disputed points about the actual construction of the Greek theatre. The archæological data are so scanty that theories entirely opposed to each other have had eminent followers in the scientific world. The stage, in particular, has been the subject of a keen controversy. Dörpfeld, for instance, maintained that in all Greek theatres the actors and the chorus performed together in the orchestra, whilst the stage served only as a background. This theory finds few supporters now, and not being an archæologist myself, I think I shall be on safe ground if I accept the authoritative opinion of A. E. Haigh, whose book on "The Attic Theatre" is remarkable for its

wealth of information and the author's insight into the peculiar character of the Greek drama.

I will quote a passage from this book so as to enable the reader to picture in his imagination the character of the visual impressions which the ancient spectator must have experienced :

“ The general conception of a Greek theatre was that of a building with a circular dancing-place in the centre, and with tiers of seats arranged round two-thirds of the ring, while the remaining side was occupied by the stage. The result was that all the spectators had an equally good view of the orchestra, while many of them had only a very poor view of the stage. This arrangement was no doubt quite natural at first, when the chorus was still the most conspicuous feature in the drama. But it may seem remarkable that it should have been retained in later times. We should remember, however, that ancient theatres were built, not only for the drama, but

also for choral and musical competitions of the most various kinds. Among the Greeks these latter were held solely in the orchestra, and had nothing to do with the stage. As they far exceeded the dramatic performances in number, it was essential in a Greek theatre that every member of the audience should have a clear and direct view of the orchestra; the view on to the stage was a matter of secondary importance. In Roman theatres the case was different. Here all performances, choral, musical, and dramatic, were transferred to the stage; the orchestra was given up to the spectators. The arrangements were, therefore, considerably modified. The orchestra and auditorium were reduced in size to a semicircle. The consequence was that the stage became a much more prominent object and that all the spectators had a fairly good view of it." ("The Attic Theatre," by A. E. Haigh, p. 82.)

The first fact, therefore, to be borne in mind, is that the Greek theatre was

not the best adapted for performances on the stage. Its construction, however, had a determining effect on the character of the Greek drama. Subordinating the stage in point of importance to the rest of the building, it compelled the Greeks to regard the performance merely as an episode of theatrical life, which excluded the very idea of an opposition between the world on the stage and the world in the auditorium.

But if this architectural feature helped to create the outward unity of the theatrical world, it was also responsible for breaking up this world from within. So long as the chorus was predominant in the drama, its central position in the orchestra served to maintain the bond which lingered from the time when the audience and the chorus had formed one body of performers. Later, when acting on the stage became the main point of interest, the attitude of the audience became purely spectacular and, as a result, the acting, from the point of view of

the observer, acquired an independent existence. This segregation of the actor was further enhanced by the view he presented from the proscenium.

The Greek proscenium formed a platform which, during the classical period, was low and moderately wide (five and fifteen feet respectively) and, later, became higher and narrower. Unlike the Roman theatre, where the widening of the stage was accompanied by a reduction in the size of the orchestra, and served to divide the stage from the audience, in the Greek theatre these changes in the width and height were due to the gradual disappearance of the chorus, and had no effect on the presentational character of the performance. They may also be neglected in considering the visual effect of acting on the Greek stage.

Let us now picture to ourselves innumerable circular tiers packed with gazers and sloping down to the orchestra in which a small group of men (twelve to fifteen in number) is seen fused with

the ground and the surrounding audience, forming together a living coating of a huge section of a cone. At the front side of this cone there cuts into it a long and narrow platform, limited by a rising backwall with architectural mouldings and painted architectural scenery. A few figures are seen on the platform. They stand silhouetted against the wall with their forms detached and carved out like statues. There are few objects around them. Every fold of their dress, every line of their masks, every moulding of the backwall, stand out clearly in the glaring daylight. Side by side with the blended masses of the spectators, they are like solitary rocks torn from the shore and washed by the sea. Though with the spectator in his familiar surroundings of a theatre, they yet rise above him, wrought into independent beings and endowed with some inner power that draws them closer to each other or drives apart. Even when they present ordinary men they seem to ennoble them,

to bestow upon them some grace of divinity.

To what an extent these visual impressions must have fitted in with the ideal character of the Greek drama, and its style of acting will be seen from the following illuminating remarks by A. E. Haigh in his book quoted above :

“ The world of Greek tragedy was an ideal world of heroes and demigods, whose nature was grander and nobler than that of human beings. The realistic portrayal of ordinary human passions was foreign to the purpose of the Greek tragedy. . . . To be in harmony with this elevation of tone it was necessary that the acting should be dignified and self-restrained. Violent movements were usually avoided. A certain statuesque simplicity and gracefulness of pose accompanied the gestures of the tragic actor. On the long and narrow stage the figures were arranged in picturesque and striking groups, and the successive scenes in the play presented to the eye of the spectator a series of

artistic tableaux. The representations of tragic scenes and personages in ancient works of art are characterized by a dignity and a repose which call to mind the creations of the sculptor." ("The Attic Theatre," p. 277.)

It is a curious fact, well illustrating the suggestive power of form on the stage, that the method of statuesque staging, when applied in the Russian theatre by Meyerhold, provided a starting point for an attempted revival of the Greek traditions. In this case, however, the detached and statuesque actor was believed to be able to bridge the barrier dividing the world of the play from the world of the audience, and so to establish the unity of action which characterized the early Greek theatre. The mistake of Meyerhold and his followers was in confusing the early forms of the Greek drama, in which the unity was achieved by the identity of the performance with the actual (religious) life of the spectator, with the later forms, in which the spectator was

already divorced from the performer, though united with him in the reality of theatrical life.

In this latter unity the statuesque form of staging doubtless played an important part, though in the Greek theatre, owing to its peculiar architectural construction, in a lesser degree, perhaps, than in other theatres of presentation, such as the Mediæval processional "pageant" and the Elizabethan theatre.

We know of two forms, the stationary and the processional, in which miracles and moralities were produced in England during the Middle Ages. Though closely related by their common origin from the liturgical play, and, possibly, by the fact that the same actors may have performed in both, I think, the stationery and the processional forms must have differed much more widely than this is suggested by their modern titles.

Leaving the discussion of this difference until a later stage of my examination of theatrical forms, I will only remark that

in the stationary method of production the performance was more of the representational nature, whilst in the processional pageant it was distinctly presentational. The element of the processional performance was a waggon which carried a platform and a booth. As the action in miracles demanded numerous localized settings, a number of waggons, with separate companies of actors in each, was used to present successively the various moments of the story. In Chester, York, Lincoln and other places, where these performances were organized by the town authorities, the waggons passed from one street to another, repeating at each "station" their particular episode of the play. Scaffolds, possibly movable, were occasionally set up when an additional platform was required to distinguish one place of action from another within a single episode, but as a rule performance was confined to the waggon. Some sort of seating accommodation was, apparently, provided at the main "station," where

the Mayor and other officials watched the spectacle, but it stands to reason that, with the waggons passing from street to street, in most cases the people had to range themselves round the waggon.

If we now picture to ourselves the actual conditions of these performances, we shall have to admit that it would be difficult to imagine anything less suitable for producing effects of the representational, *i.e.* illusionistic character. The waggon stood in the midst of real houses, and was surrounded by a crowd of spectators. The semblance of a building on the waggon, with scanty properties inside it and on the platform in front, was barely sufficient to indicate the place of the action, and could not possibly transform the stage into something complete in itself, a world of its own, as it were. Added to this, there was the bridging effect of the playing of actors, whose clear-cut figures on a bare platform made them look as if they had just jumped thereon from the watching crowd, whilst the necessity of



A. Chekhov's "THREE SISTERS" (Act III.) on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre.

conveying the story by means only of their own acting, compelled them to explain and present the play to the spectator, and thus maintain an uninterrupted contact between him and the stage. In fine, the natural surroundings, the closeness of the audience, the simplicity and conventionalism of setting, and the prominence of the actor, all combined to produce the effect of a frank theatrical display, which excluded the very possibility of a barrier dividing the performance from the real world in which the audience lived. In considering the pageant play there is even no need to take it in the processional form described above. Single waggon performances were much more frequent than processional cycles, and formed the principal unit of the Mediæval English theatre. Their greater popularity also explains the fact that the Elizabethan theatre was modelled on the lines of the single pageant stage as that appeared in inns and courtyards, and not on those of the processional play, much less so of

the stationary one with its distinct representational character.

Our knowledge of the Elizabethan stage is mostly conjectural, and there is still a great divergence of opinion as to its precise construction and working. Its main features, however, have been made sufficiently clear. In the Globe, the Fortune, and a few other theatres of which we have reliable information, the stage building was not concealed behind the proscenium arch as we see it in the modern theatre, but was clearly in the sight of the audience, forming an integral part of the theatre building as a whole. The stage platform (the "apron" stage, as it has been called since) extended some twenty feet into the auditorium, and at its farthest end had a shallow recess which, most probably, was divided from the outer platform by a curtain.

Without going into arguments upon the use of the method of presentation on the Elizabethan stage, since this use is universally admitted, I will only try to

indicate the connection which existed between this method and the position of the spectator. Too much importance, it seems to me, is being attached to the conventional character of the Elizabethan setting. Some authors explain this conventionalism by the extraordinary power of imagination, which they believe the Shakespearian audience possessed and had to exercise in cases of extreme incongruity in the properties on the stage. Whether this incongruity, as, for instance, the presence of trees in the place which was supposed to represent a room, did actually exist, is a matter of argument and conjecture. But the important point is that even a greater fidelity to realism in setting would not have destroyed the fundamental convention which lay at the basis of the Elizabethan stage. This "convention" was the reality of performance as performance, and it rested not on any power of imagination, but on its exact opposite—the sense of actuality. What matter, whether the location and

character of the scene were indicated by announcements on sign-boards, or were suggested more directly by realistic properties on the inner stage? The fact that these properties were just stage properties and nothing else, was too patent to permit of any illusions as to what was proceeding on the stage. Indeed, we should be doing injustice to the intelligence of the Elizabethan audiences if we thought them capable of entertaining such illusions in the face of reality which clearly contradicted them. One of the constituents of that reality, the architectural unity of the stage with the rest of the theatre building, has already been noticed. The other constituent, consequent upon the former, was no less decisive in its bearing on the effect of performance. It should be remembered that the essential condition of every kind of illusionism is the existence of a distinctive atmosphere enveloping the world of the play. But in the Elizabethan theatre the atmosphere permeating the

stage was that of the auditorium, and not of the play, since most of the action took place on the unpropertied outer stage, projected far into the yard, whilst the properties on the inner stage formed merely a background standing by itself and detached from the actor. The latter, therefore, was necessarily seen in the statuesque guise, which further contributed to the theatrical unity of the audience and the performer, just as a group of men, each one distinct and independent, would feel themselves united on a common ground when brought together in familiar surroundings. The bridging effect of the undisguised "theatrical ground" should not, however, be confused with the complete fusion of the spectator, the actor, and the play in one continuous world of action. The same statuesque appearance of the actor, which by its realism contributed to the theatrical unity, also served to emphasize the essential difference between the actor and the spectator. The part of the former was

to act, and of the latter to look on. The distance which divided the two and determined the statuesque effect, ensured this distribution of parts by keeping always clear before the mind of the spectator his distinctiveness from, and opposition to, the personality of the actor.

It would be beyond the scope of the present cursory review were I to enter into discussion of further characteristics of the Elizabethan, and particularly the Shakespearian, stage. The problem of presentation of character, as distinct from presentation of situation, seems to be particularly engaging, but I have to leave it until another opportunity may occur. I must adopt the same course also with regard to the early forms of the theatres in Italy, Spain, and France, in this case mainly for the reason that my knowledge of the *actual conditions* of performances in those national theatres is too deficient to permit of my embarking on so serious a task as construing up the visual impressions of their audiences.

himself was living in the world of the play. These methods have been best illustrated by Meyerhold's stagings on one plane, Reinhardt's productions in amphitheatres, and Evreinov's monodrama. As regards the Russian experiments, they are dealt with at length in the essay on the Russian stage, so that only a few further remarks need be made here.

In Meyerhold's productions the stage as an independent reality ceased to exist. The flat background close to the footlights and the grouping of actors in a line tended to destroy the materialistic appearance of objects and transformed the stage into a world of visionary images. In this world continuity reigned supreme, linking and tying all the objects in one span of space. Facing it in the darkened hall of the theatre was the audience, which could see but little around itself to provide a realistic contrast and so confine the spiritualized images to a fixed location in the building. With their imagination aroused and their eyes riveted

on the flat scenic world, the spectators were no longer capable of maintaining their attitude of mere onlookers. The sense of continuity between themselves and the images in front of them was bound to arise. And so the stage and the audience became blended in the visionary world which seemed to lift them above the reality of their theatrical existence.

It will be observed that in this form of staging the play is not *presented* in the conditions of theatrical reality, but is *represented* to the point of complete illusion. The spectator is united both with the performance as a whole, and the performer as its constituent part. Not that this effect was always or completely achieved in Meyerhold's productions (the obstacles of the theatrical reality made this well-nigh impossible), but the method did carry in itself the possibility of its realization, and from the point of view assumed in this study, I think, I shall be justified in classing

Meyerhold's method as a characteristic form of theatrical unity in terms of subjective representation.

From flat decorative scenery, through statuesque isolation, to congregate action in the orchestra—such was the line of development along which Meyerhold was proceeding during the first period of his work. He had hardly approached its last stage, however, when he turned off to the method of presentation, endeavouring to obtain unity in the undisguised fact of a theatrical spectacle rather than in elaborate attempts at substituting for the reality of a theatre an illusion of some other reality. But the thread of representational unity left off by Meyerhold was taken up by Reinhardt, who carried it further, exploring new avenues in the theatrical realm and obtaining results of abiding interest.

The original contribution made by Reinhardt to the modern development of the theatre is confined mainly to those of his productions in which he attempted to do

away with the stage and thus establish a more intimate contact between the actor and the audience. But interesting as his staging of "Oedipus Rex" and "The Miracle" were, they clearly showed that Reinhardt himself had a somewhat confused idea of the dramatic effect he was striving to realize. With Reinhardt, as with Meyerhold, the starting point for the new departure was provided by the conception of the Greek orchestra. It seems that in the opinion of Reinhardt the intimate atmosphere which pervaded the Greek theatre was produced by bringing the performer and the spectator into a direct, indeed, into an almost physical, contact. Hence it followed, that given the same contact in the modern theatre, the audience and the play would be immediately united. This condition of unity, Reinhardt believed, he had found in transferring the acting from the stage to the arena of a circus.

Now, to appreciate the actual effect he was able to produce by this shifting of the stage, we have to consider the theatrical

elements which were involved in his experiment.

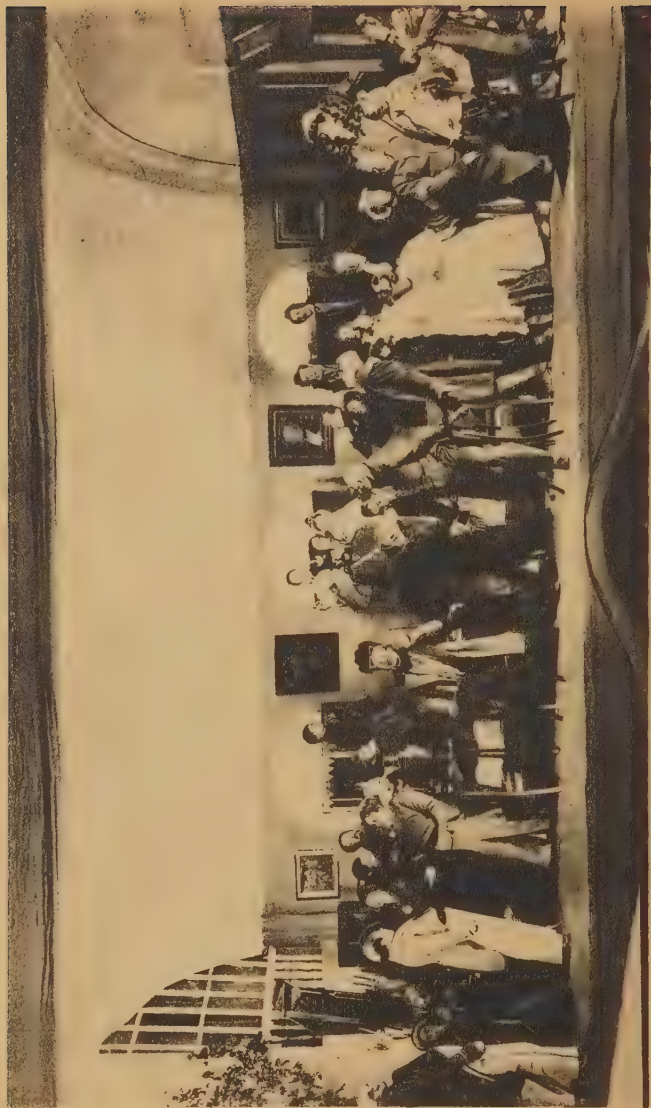
To begin with the idea of unity as realized in the Greek theatre, we find Reinhardt basing himself on a conception which, as I have shown earlier, is essentially wrong. Of the two forms evolved by the Greeks, the unity of actual life (the theatre of action), and the unity of theatrical life (the theatre of presentation), he apparently admitted only the first. But in interpreting it he again failed to grasp the central fact that this unity was achieved not so much by the contact of the performer with the audience, as by the fundamental identity of the subject of the play and the performance itself, with the religious life of the spectator. It follows, therefore, that complete intimacy could be restored to the theatre only by making performance a part of general religious ritual. But as the character of religious actuality was never evident in Reinhardt's productions (nor could it in all justice be expected to be found there), the result was that the gap

between the actor and the spectator was bridged by him more in appearance than in reality. To find some common ground on which the desired union could be effected, Reinhardt had to resort to illusionism, substituting for the plane of religious actuality, in which the audience and the actors of the early Greek theatre freely and naturally came into contact, the plane of an illusory world *represented* by scenery and acting in such a way as to induce the spectator to believe that he himself formed a part of that world. This characteristic basis of Reinhardt's method is in itself a striking proof of the sterile and decadent nature of all such attempts at whipping up enfeebled emotion by administering powerful doses of an illusory stimulant.

The above remarks indicate the points of difference between the Greek theatre and Reinhardt's productions. But dramatic effects must be appraised independently of their ties with the past, and the effect of unity obtained by Reinhardt is fully entitled to be discussed on its own merits.

In Reinhardt's productions the spectator is placed in a direct contact with the performers, and this causes him to be drawn into the atmosphere of the play. The union is effected in two forms : first, by leaving the spectator in the position of a mere observer, which is the main form, and second, by bringing him almost to the verge of acting. When merely observing the action of the play, Reinhardt's spectator can be likened to a member of a crowd watching a street accident. As in the latter case, he is clearly conscious of opposition between himself and the actual heroes of the scene observed. But whereas in the street crowd the onlooker is face to face with real life, in a Reinhardt's performance the world of the play remains imaginary, whilst the spectator is transformed into a member of a real crowd living in that world and witnessing the events there proceeding. The effect of unity in this case is, therefore, based not so much on an illusion of reality of the play enacted, as, if I may say so, on an illusion of "reality of onlooking." This circum-

stance serves to explain the use of the second means employed by Reinhardt in bridging the actors and the audience. The reality of his being an onlooker in a crowd is brought to the mind of the spectator by the scenic transformation of the auditorium into a part of the general setting. After what had been said before on the significance of various perceptions of space, there will be no difficulty in understanding the suggestive power which both these means bring to bear on the spectator. Thus, the first element in the impression of unity is contributed by the fused masses of spectators in the amphitheatre. The architectural unity of the latter with the arena, made manifest by the setting, supplies another link. On the other hand, the detached figures of the performers, together with the marked forms of the architectural scenery both in the arena and the auditorium, qualify the elements of unity as those operating within a realistic, *i.e.*, objectively present and inwardly discontinuous world. The last qualification,



"THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL" by *Nickolas Gogol*, as produced at the

The forms of unity between the audience and the performance, which have been examined so far, may be classed in two groups which are related by one common feature—the identity of the performance with the real life of the audience. When the performance was a part of the religious life of the audience, as in the early Greek theatre and, probably, in the church mystery-plays, the unity between the world of the play enacted and that of the audience was complete, and spectator and actor were fused in one person. As the theatre freed itself from its bond with religion, the reality of the theatre as a place for performing asserted itself ever more strongly, leading to a division between the actor and the spectator. We had examples of this “theatrical” form of real life in the classical Greek theatre, the Mediæval processional pageant, and the Elizabethan theatre. I now have to refer to the third form of unity: the unity in make-believe, in illusion.

It is a characteristic fact that the idea

of this kind of unity is entirely modern in its origin. The ancient theatres never occupied themselves with the problem of bridging the stage and the auditorium, as these were bridged in the very forms of their architectural construction. Only since a barrier was raised between the spectator and the actor by the introduction of the Italian picture-frame stage, did the loss of the former unity begin to be felt with an ever-increasing force. It was natural that in the theatre so divided solution was sought in various devices capable of disguising the fundamental partition. Three methods have suggested themselves to the producer: (1) the audience and the performance could be united above the theatre, as it were, by creating an illusion of another world temporarily holding sway within the theatrical walls; (2) they could be joined in the auditorium by bringing the actors over the stage to act amongst the audience; (3) lastly, they could be brought together on the stage by gulling the spectator into a belief that he

however, is apt to lose much of its restrictive force in the case of those scenes in which the arena itself becomes crowded with performers. The continuity of the amphitheatre is then extended from end to end of the theatrical building, and the audience, drawn into the whirl of action on the arena, is lifted, so to speak, to the state of "potential actors," which brings the performance almost to the verge of the theatre of action. That this limit is never crossed in Reinhardt's productions, as it was in the early period of the Greek orchestra, and that the potential actor fails to convert his worked up energy into a kinetic action, is entirely due to the inner contradiction of Reinhardt's method, which is hidden in its substitution of make-belief emotionalism for the religious actuality characteristic of the true theatre of action.

The illusion of unity which Evereïnov set out to attain by means of his "monodrama" is of a somewhat different nature. It is suggested that by representing the subjective experiences of the leading

character, styled "Ego" (which, by the way, would mean his continuous presence on the stage, and would, therefore, considerably restrict the choice of subjects admitting of such treatment), the spectator will be led to identify himself with his actions and feelings, and so will be, as it were, transferred bodily on to the stage. Granting that this effect can be obtained (and, personally, I incline to doubt such possibility), the world of the play, which will be facing the spectator, will be either opposed to him in its elements, *i.e.* discontinuous, or embracing him in its unity, *i.e.* continuous. Accordingly, the staging will be either extending in depth, or it will be flat. But here we come to the forms of space on the stage, which are imbued with their own significance and are bound to influence the premissed unity with the play. How Evreïnov proposes to deal with them I do not know, but it is clear that the possible combinations may contain a number of counter-effects neutralizing one another,

and to try and analyse them here on mere hypothetical grounds would be a thankless and unprofitable task.

In the forms of the theatre so far reviewed the world of the spectator and that of the play were brought into unity either by bringing the play down into the actual life of the spectator, or by lifting the latter up into the illusory reality of the play. The history of the theatre shows, however, a number of forms which aimed at attaining the exactly opposite effect. The world of the play was set off as a thing complete in itself, whilst the spectator was kept rigorously outside as a mere onlooker who chanced to be present during the progress of events on the stage. It may be said that only in the modern theatre has this method of representation found its complete realization, but the tendency in this direction was manifest throughout history. Its earliest indications can be traced in the Roman theatre which, though based on the theatre of the Greeks, soon

departed from their traditions. The changes introduced by the Romans in the theatre construction have already been mentioned. The orchestra was reduced in size and was used to accommodate spectators. The stage, now brought nearer to the audience, was enlarged and lowered ; it had a roof and a front curtain (whether either of these was present in the Greek theatre is still a matter of guess-work), and, altogether, gained in prominence and completeness. These constructional changes, though unable to destroy the architectural unity of the theatre building entirely, must, doubtless, have considerably weakened it and, coupled with elaborate and realistic settings, were bound to tell in the general effect of dramatic performance. At all events, the features here described provide sufficient evidence of a pronounced tendency towards representation that marked the Roman stage.

Another early example of this method I see in the Mediæval stationary play. It

was performed in a ring arranged, it is believed, in the same way as the preserved Cornish rounds. The audience was seated in a narrow amphitheatre, or simply on the ground, whilst in the round itself there were set up a number of scaffolds standing for various buildings and localities. As the plot of the miracle was unfolded, the action passed from one place in the ring to another, being performed on the scaffolds when properties were required to specify the action, and on the ground when no such specification seemed necessary.

In studying the nature of the stationary performance we are, at the outset, able to draw some interesting inferences from the fact that it originated from the liturgical play. In church mysteries and miracles, just as in the early Dionysian festivals, the moment of "spectacle" was practically absent. The play formed part and parcel of religious ritual and was looked upon as completely real in itself. Only gradually, mainly owing to

the presence of comical scenes, the liturgical play assumed the character of a show, and it was then that it passed to the market-place. The spectator and the actor became clearly separated, but the play itself still retained its religious atmosphere and still formed a world distinct from ordinary life. When miracles began to be produced in rounds, the church arrangement of acting in *sedes* and *plateae* was faithfully reproduced in the method of acting on scaffolds and the ground.¹ So, what in church was a part of the general ritual, in which all those present took an intimate part, here in the round became a world in itself clearly detached from the world of the audience. This point will be made even more evident if we take into consideration that the stage, *i.e.* the ring, had no points of contact with the audience, either as a part of one architectural whole, or as an arena the theatrical nature of which would need no demonstration.

¹ Cf. Chambers' "The Medieval Stage," v. ii. p. 136.

On the contrary, it was clearly marked off against the auditorium, which was practically neutral, as a place complete in itself and entirely bound up with the world of the play. The degree of illusionism possible in the stationary performances is, of course, not to be compared with the achievements of the modern stage, but it was sufficient to draw a line dividing the play and the audience. Even the conventional setting, which in the pageant play, by contrast with realistic surroundings, helped to produce the effect of a set-up show, must have appeared here as a consistent and real representation of some strange world. As against this, there must be admitted that the method of acting tended in the opposite direction, the prologue and the addresses to the audience creating a link where the form of the stage enforced a division. It cannot, therefore, be said that performances in the rounds were completely representational, but the presence in them of the latter element seems

to have been markedly evident, whilst in the pageant performances representation was entirely absent. It should only be added, in order to complete the characteristic of the stationary play, that opposed though the ring, with its play-atmosphere, was to the audience, within itself it presented a picture of a fragmentary world which greatly differed from the continuous, fusing atmosphere which enveloped performers in the church mysteries. Accordingly the audience watching the stationary play was being induced to take up the attitude of mere observation, whilst in the church the continuous unity amongst the actors tended to spread to the spectators and draw them into the performance.

With this I will take leave of history and pass to the forms which the desire of keeping the stage completely self-sufficient has assumed in our own time. Their best illustration will again be found in Russia where the Moscow Art Theatre has been able to attain the heights of re-

presentation never reached in any other country. Without needlessly repeating what has been stated elsewhere I will only try to answer the following two questions : (1) How does the spectator in the Art Theatre stand with relation to the play as a whole, and (2) with relation to the individual elements that form that whole ?

The Italian picture-frame stage had already provided the Art Theatre with the initial division between the stage and the auditorium. But before the advent of naturalism the conventional scenery and the lime-light conspicuousness of leading characters were still able to maintain a certain link with the audience. It was necessary, therefore, to sweep away the old traditions in setting, and to impart unity and atmosphere to the acting, in order that the play on the stage should be facing the spectator as an independent whole existing in accordance with its own laws. The naturalistic method employed by the Art Theatre supplied the means for realizing the first object. Step by step,

starting with faithful reproduction of realistic details, the Art Theatre concluded by abolishing the footlights and introducing the so-called "fourth wall." Similarly, in the way of acting, the characters were jealously kept within the strict boundaries imposed by the tone and atmosphere of the play. Ensemble became the watchword, and nothing was considered so offensive as the position of a figure pushed out to the front and torn from its naturalistic background. It is interesting to note that during its initial period of development the Art Theatre endeavoured to obtain unity on the stage by the somewhat mechanical means of overcrowding the scenes whenever there was the slightest opportunity. It was for this reason, it seems to me, that mass scenes were at first so popular with the Art Theatre. They helped to fill the stage and join together its otherwise scattered elements. When, later on, as in Chekhov's plays, more subtle means of creating a tone were worked out, the

Art Theatre began to admit, in an ever growing degree, a certain disjunction of characters, a discontinuity which eventually brought it to the method of staging so characteristically marked in its production of "The Inspector-General." Here the characters acquired a sculpturesque relief which seemed to expand the stage and transform each figure into a world in itself.

The two questions formulated above can now be answered thus: (1) the spectator in the Art Theatre stands opposed to the play which is represented as a world objectively given and entirely determined by its own laws; (2) the unity of this world is that of tone and atmosphere, whilst within it shows a marked tendency towards subdivision and discontinuity.

With equal force the last definitions may be applied to realism in general. What distinguishes the realistic method from every other method is not so much its fidelity to nature, as its striving to produce the illusion of an objective world

opposed to the spectator and inwardly spilt up into innumerable self-centred entities.

As objective existence on the stage is conceivable only in terms of naturalism, every other form of illusionism must, of necessity, be subjective, *i.e.* it must invoke the spectator's power of imagination. Subjectivism, therefore, implies a certain intimate contact between the stage and the audience and, as has been demonstrated in the case of Meyerhold's, Evreinov's and Reinhardt's productions, actually leads to various forms of unity. One can conceive, however, of a form of subjective representation which would be based on the perception of discontinuity. This would happen in a case in which the nature of the symbolical realities, subjectively realized on the stage, would demand an observing or contemplative attitude on the part of the spectator. Just as in real life, so in the world of our visions we can assert our inner self against the realities which are revealed to our spirit. We

mentally embrace and encompass the realm in which they abide, and in so far they are part of ourselves, but we project them outward and hold them up before our vision so that we may peer into their nature and observe the interplay of their activities. In the theatre of subjective representation the nature of the illusionary world may be such as to destroy our sense of individuality and dissolve us entirely in our vision (Meyerhold, Reinhardt), or it may definitely mark a line between ourselves and the images that are called forth in us. The latter effect will, evidently, be achieved when our projected images and we ourselves are localized in space. But localization means discontinuity, and so the three-dimensional space, particularly, as stereoscopically perceived, becomes the ideal form in which our position with regard to the stage is made manifest to our senses.

Perhaps the nearest approach to this effect will be found in the method of staging advocated by Mr Gordon Craig.

His theories of the theatre, as I had occasion to remark, are not a little confusing, but looking deeper into the general conceptions which underlie them, I think, we shall perceive just this desire to set up a world of spiritual beings unravelling their inner nature before the observing spectator. It is worth noticing with what persistence Mr Gordon Craig strives to emphasize the form of objects on the stage, and how intent he is to produce the effect of an infinite expanse in which figures and objects stand out like lonely monuments in a wild desert. This feature also throws some light on his preaching of simplified forms. Like other followers of the method of subjective representation he endeavours to create the illusion of true reality by an appeal to the spectator's imagination. But he differs from them in that he leaves the spectator completely conscious of his position in the auditorium (hence Mr Craig's sympathy with the early theatres of presentation), whilst he creates the atmosphere of spirituality by simplifying

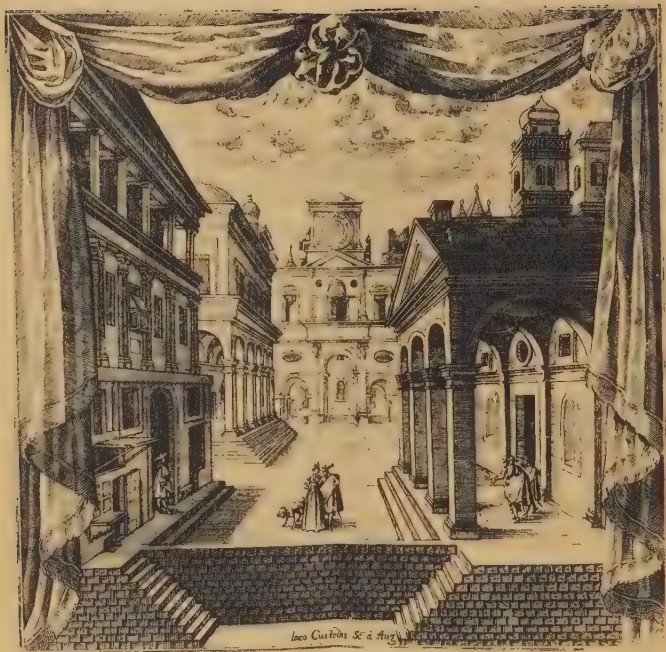
the appearance of things to the point where they become transformed into abstract entities. In this way he combines subjective illusionism on the stage with the sense of actuality in the auditorium, and welds them into one whole in the spectator's vision of a fragmentary world of spiritual realities.

Whilst discussing the forms of discontinuity in the theatre I cannot help mentioning the perspective stage employed in Italy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I am entirely ignorant of the way in which this stage was used by the Italians, and the effects it served to produce. But when I look at the old drawings, such as Serlio's and Furttenbach's, I clearly perceive that in these abstract architectural surroundings the human figure becomes a small but self-centred unit, opposed to every other figure or object, and that so long as it remains within the limits of this monumental world, this latter stands before the spectator as an independent entity

composed of innumerable self-detached elements. It is a source of regret that the modern producers, in search of significant forms for the method of representation, have completely overlooked the signal expressiveness of the early perspective stage.

I do not propose to discuss here the relative value of the various forms of the theatre, reviewed in this essay. There is, however, one aspect of the problem which has a direct bearing on the questions discussed, and should, therefore, be pointed out.

In art, just as in the ordinary walks of life, nothing succeeds like success. Whatever means the artist may employ, it is by the final effect that he will be judged. Nevertheless, or rather because of that, it is the means that justify the end, and not the reverse. As applied to the theatre, this resolves itself into the principle: those forms of the theatre are justified which are able to realize the effect they set themselves to produce. But is it not true



An Italian Perspective Scenery of the Seventeenth Century.

[From J. FURTENBACH'S "*Architectura Civilis*" ULM, 1628]

that every medium has its limitations, and that the theatre likewise can yield no more than its natural properties will allow? However skilful the producer may be, if he strains the resources of the theatre beyond their natural limit, the effect is bound to be false, and nothing is more intolerable in art than inward falsity. The method of objective illusionism has been particularly criticized on this score, and its efforts to transform the stage into something that is entirely unlike the stage have been considered its greatest offence against the principles of art. There is much in this charge which cannot be gainsaid, though the *natural capacity of the stage to undergo transformation* is far from being as restricted as is believed by many. But what is still more important, a new theatrical medium has sprung up amongst us, which does away even with these restrictions. The much abused kinematograph has come to show us the way in which we can obtain a complete command of space. The "hussy" is still in her

teens, but that she will grow up into a lady of charming manners and refined taste is, to my mind, beyond doubt. We shall see then the problems which engage the modern theatre restated in new terms and solved on new lines. I can foresee three of the forms which will thus be evolved. The form of objective representation, in which the spectator will watch the world of real life as if he were invisibly present in the events portrayed. The form of subjective representation in which he will contribute his imaginative faculties to creating the illusion of conventional reality. And, lastly, the form of presentation in which the kinematographic picture will be just a moving picture displayed on the theatrical wall in front of the theatrical audience. The perception of space on which these forms will depend will accordingly vary from the complete stereoscopic and, therefore, discontinuous effect in the first form, to the flat and continuous effect on the "stage," and the realistic and discon-

tinuous effect in the auditorium, in the last form. There will be no *complete* continuity and no "theatre of action" in the cinematograph, as the position of the spectator, the actor and the play will be strictly defined as against each other. For such reason, if for no other, I particularly welcome this new development of the art of the theatre, and I do so the more willingly, because I am a convinced spectator, jealous of my own personality, and eager to watch a spectacle, but never to act in somebody else's show.

III

TABLE OF FORMS OF THE THEATRE¹

A. FORMS OF UNITY IN THE THEATRE

I. The audience and the play united through the identity of the play with real life.

(a) Objective unity in action : audience—actors ; the world of action—continuous.

(Theatre of action : the early Greek theatre, religious plays.)

(b) Objective unity in observation : audience—spectators ; performance—theatrical reality ; audience united

¹ The classification of theatre-forms here given does not attempt to record all the forms revealed throughout history. Being analytical in its nature, *i.e.* proceeding from certain abstract conceptions, it is justified inasmuch as it succeeds in bringing out the elements and the main types of forms of the theatre.

with the play, but opposed to each character.

(Theatre of presentation: the Mediæval stage, the Shakespearian theatre.)

2. The audience and the play united in the illusory world of the play (subjective unity in representation)
Audience—part actors.

(a) The illusory world continuous (Meyerhold's staging of Mæterlinck, Reinhardt).

(b) The illusory world realistically discontinuous (Evreïnov's "mono-drama").

B. FORMS OF DISUNITY IN THE THEATRE.

The audience and the play stand opposed.

1. The illusory world discontinuous (objective representation in the Moscow

Art Theatre ; subjective representation in Mr Gordon Craig's method of staging).

2. The illusory world continuous (presentation in flat kinematograph pictures).

A NOTE ON MR GORDON
CRAIG'S THEORIES

A NOTE ON MR GORDON CRAIG'S THEORIES

No one will deny Mr Craig artistic genius or striking individuality. He feels the shortcomings of the modern theatre and intuitively, as an artist, conceives the forms in which it would find a loftier and more perfect expression. He has failed, however, to reconcile his many and various sympathies and antipathies in a clear and harmonious theory. Perhaps, personally, he does not require one, trusting entirely to his own sense of what is true art in the theatre. But, unfortunately, the shameful indifference of the English public has given him practically no chance of testing his ideas on a proper scale, and still keeps them in the state of abstract moulds which may, presumably, require considerable reshaping before they are found perfectly adapted to the nature of the material

worked upon. This fact creates a strange position: the artist has to be judged not by his actual work but by the views he holds, which, obviously, is most abnormal. But as views, whoever holds them, exercise their own influence and have an independent existence, it becomes necessary for the critic to subject them to an impartial examination, and to bring out their essential elements when these happen to be enfolded in a tissue of conflicting thoughts.

The confusion of Mr Craig's ideas will be seen from the following quotation: "As I have written elsewhere the Theatre will continue its growth and actors will continue for some years to hinder its development. But I see a loophole by which in time the actors can escape from the bondage they are in. They must create for themselves a new form of acting, consisting for the main part of symbolical gesture. To-day they *impersonate* and interpret; to-morrow they must *represent* and interpret; and the third day

they must create. By this means style may return. To-day the actor impersonates a certain being. He cries to the audience: 'Watch me; I am now pretending to be so and so, and I am now pretending to do so and so,' and then he proceeds to imitate as exactly as possible that which he has announced he will *indicate*. For instance he is Romeo. He tells the audience that he is in love, and he proceeds to show it by kissing Juliet. This, it is claimed, is a work of art; it is claimed for this that it is an intelligent way of suggesting thought. Why—why, that is just as if a painter were to draw upon the wall a picture of an animal with long ears and then write under it, 'This is a donkey.' The long ears make it plain enough, one would think, without the inscription, and any child of ten does as much. The difference between the child of ten and the artist is that the artist is he who by drawing certain signs and shapes creates the impression of a donkey; and the greater artist is he who creates the

impression of the whole genus of donkey, the *spirit* of the thing." ("On the Art of the Theatre," p. 61-62.) In another part of his book Mr Craig says: "In England we find a clever actor laughing at his part and himself, and winking all the time at the audience, horrified least he may be taken seriously. . . . Here in Moscow they risk the blunder and achieve the distinction of being the best set of actors upon the European stage." (*Ibid.*, p. 135.) The last quotation seems to indicate that Mr Craig is opposed to any display of "acting" ("winking," "mockery" as he styles it), and is heart and soul with the earnestness of the Moscow company who seem to live in their parts. In the terms used in this book he takes his stand with *representation* against *presentation*. Then we see that in the forms of representation he strongly denounces naturalism, whilst favouring symbolism. But here we come to the crucial point. What is Mr Craig's symbolism? Judging by his writings it is a form of spiritualism in which symbols are

not mere generalizations of the concrete facts but are themselves living realities. At the same time he often speaks of symbolism as merely a method of artistic simplification, which is, of course, an altogether different thing. Now spiritualism, pure and simple, makes no claim to any specific form of its realization in the theatre. Apart from the theatre of action in which it can hold an unrestricted sway, in the theatre-spectacle spiritualism can be realized in scenic forms by the methods both of representation (either objective or subjective) and of presentation. The same applies to simplification, the use of which also is not restricted to any of the two methods mentioned. How are we then to understand Mr Craig's opposition of creative or symbolical acting to impersonation and interpretation? If he sees the object of the theatre in giving life on the stage to spiritual realities, this can surely be done only by impersonation. If on the other hand, the object lies in reducing manifold impressions of life to some

essential simplified forms, then, as surely, the actor does not create but merely interprets. In addition to this we find Mr Craig often expressing sympathy with the old English and Italian theatres which, we know, exclusively employed the method of presentation. Small wonder that as a result of all this confusion of principles, Mr Craig's conception of theatrical production can be called anything but clear. Yet, in spite of its theoretical obscurity, there is sound sense and a clear message in the vision of the theatre which hovers before the mind of Mr Craig. Elsewhere I attempt to translate it into clear terms of the theatre-grammar, reconciling in the concrete and particular instance what in its theoretical form was a mass of contradictions. Thus it is only in concrete realization and not in theory that Mr Craig's vision of a new theatre can find its true justification.

THE KINEMATOGRAPH AS ART

THE KINEMATOGRAPH AS ART¹

THE wonderful popularity enjoyed by the kinematograph during the last decade has been for a long time a subject of eager discussion in those circles which have the interests of the theatre at heart. The various groups of art-workers connected with the theatre, such as the dramatists, the actors, and the artists, are directly involved in the problem, and it is interesting to note how different has been the attitude revealed toward it by each of these sections. The artists, perhaps the most cultured of these three groups from the standpoint of art, have simply ignored the kinematograph as something so crude and inartistic as to be unworthy of serious notice. It is true a few genuine attempts have been made at reform, but for several reasons, of which

¹ The above essay was originally published in the American quarterly, *The Drama*, and is reproduced here with a few slight alterations.

the principal was that the artists failed to comprehend the real nature of the medium, they all proved a complete failure.

The attitude of the majority of the actors has been much more condescending. Those amongst them who have generally concerned themselves very little with matters of art have accepted the kinematograph with the docile humility that is accorded to all things of the natural order. They have transferred to the new invention whatever knowledge of drama they had gained on the legitimate stage, in addition to which they supplied only one new feature — an extreme exaggeration in mimicry and action, which they held to be the chief peculiarity of moving pictures. On the other hand, the more advanced members of the theatrical profession, those who have really been anxious to propagate and establish on the stage the principles of vital art, however much they may have diverged in their interpretation of them, at once realized the danger which threatened the drama from the encroachment of the

modern kinematograph theatres, and did not hesitate to proclaim a most resolute opposition in an endeavour to protect their art from being contaminated by this "vulgar mechanical device."

Thus we see those sections of the community, for whom art has been an object of vital faith, have rejected the kinematograph as a medium devoid of any artistic qualities. But it would be wrong to infer that it has always lacked faithful champions. Strange as it may appear, these have come from the group which is furthest removed from the actuality of the problems of the theatre, namely the dramatists. As might be expected, the only fault the "litterateurs" have been able to detect in moving pictures has been found in the plot, and as a consequence they have set themselves the task of remedying it. With an enviable ease they began to pour out elaborate philosophical dramas, mystery plays, tragedies, "literary" melo-dramas, and what not, in order to demonstrate what "artistic" possibilities had been lying dor-

mant in the neglected and abused kinematograph. Once they found that the theatre was no longer held in popular esteem, they had no compunction in erecting their rostrum on the picture-screen, the more so as this, in their opinion, served at once to achieve two objects — the popularization of the drama and the elevation of moving pictures to a higher artistic level. I need only mention such names as Gabriel D'Annunzio and Leonid Andreyev to show what resolute and self-confident arch-priests of literature have undertaken the task of reforming the moving-picture play. But though their attempts have raised a whole host of arguments and controversies amongst all interested in the theatre, there can be little doubt that failure must be the inevitable result of their efforts. Their defence of the pictures is as inherently wrong as is the opposition of artists and actors, since both are the outcome of a complete failure to understand the peculiar nature of the kinematograph as a medium of art.

But if the dramatists' defence leaves us

entirely unmoved, as coming virtually from "outsiders," we cannot but deplore the opposition on the side of those who ought to be the first and foremost exponents of the new art of moving pictures. For there is an artistic future for the kinematograph—a future as great as any form of artistic drama can hope to attain. We may ignore the criticisms of those who are sufficiently advanced to condemn as utter vulgarity the modern moving pictures as well as photographs, gramophones, and most other products of the over-resourceful mechanical genius of our time. These well-intentioned dilettantes are only victims of the prevailing artistic conventions, and have no standard of their own to discriminate between what is art and what is not. The future of the kinematograph does not rest with them. It depends upon those enlightened and liberal lovers of art who can see beyond the conventions of the moment, who possess a range of sympathies which is already wide enough to embrace such divergent revelations of art as, for example,

the static art of Egypt, the decorativeness of Eastern art, and the rudimentality of Sezanne and Van Goch, or referring strictly to the domain of drama, the ancient tragedy, the puppet show and the productions of modern reformers. Theirs is the task of creating the canons and standards, and eventually, of course, the conventions of the art of the kinematograph, and of building up a tradition that will, in due course, pass through the period when it is merely fashionable to attain finally the state of an acknowledged form of artistic expression.

It is with the object of securing a more sympathetic attitude for this, at the present time so much discredited, medium that I venture, however conscious of the heresy, to advance a plea for the kinematograph as a vehicle of real art-expression.

Much has been said in the Press about the issues involved in the problem of moving pictures: their special appeal to the masses; their competition with the theatre; whether they are to supersede the latter or whether they are doomed to

be merely a transient fashion and eventually disappear ; their artistic crudity, *i.e.* whether they are a reversal to the methods of the Booth and whether they indicate the birth of a new democratic art ; and many other similar questions. With these issues I am little concerned in this article. Without wishing to detract from their interest and importance, I hold that they leave entirely aside the most essential factor of the problem—the peculiar nature of the medium which alone should form the basis of its possible artistic application. Before, however, I am able to enter upon a discussion of this problem, there has to be cleared away a number of popular misconceptions, held, alas ! with such tenacity as to make one despair whether any arguments against them will ever prevail. In the sphere of ideas as that of biology it would seem that the lowest forms are the most tenacious of life.

One of the first duties of the critic is discrimination. However, so far as the cinematograph is concerned, the criticisms

so liberally hurled at it from all sides have been little distinguished by this character. Two entirely distinct things have been persistently confused by all critics—the kinematograph as a medium, and the kinematograph theatre as we know it at the present time. That the second is below criticism—indeed, something coarse, crude, and altogether ugly—can be easily and unreservedly admitted. But to deduce from this fact, as is often done, the impossibility of an artistic kinematograph would betray lack of logic and imagination. It is evident, in the first place, that many drawbacks of the modern kinema-drama are in no way connected with the kinematograph as a peculiar medium of dramatic expression. To take, for instance, the vulgar realism of moving pictures which is so much complained of. Is it a peculiar feature of the kinematograph? The students of the theatre will agree that naturalism as vulgar as this had been reigning on the legitimate stage long before the kinematograph was ever able to compete with it. The pictures

simply followed along the beaten track, bringing to logical absurdity what the legitimate drama, not endowed with the infinite resourcefulness of its competitor, could only pursue half-way.

It is unnecessary to dwell upon the many similar drawbacks of the kinematograph. I am not so much concerned with what it actually is as with what it might be. The problem that really matters may be stated in the words : is the kinematograph a medium capable of artistic achievement in the two fields that make up the art of the stage, the dramatic and the pictorial ? The answer to this question necessarily involves a discussion of the vexed question of mechanical art. However reluctant I am to touch upon this controversy, so much abused and of so little profit to anyone concerned, I am unable to avoid it altogether. So bowing my will before the inevitable, I shall try to dispose of it in the briefest possible manner.

It is often contended that automatic mechanism can never attain to anything

like artistic perfection, and that consequently there is no artistic future for the kinematograph.

It is obvious that the whole argument stands or falls by the definition of "mechanism." But this definition is never stated in anything like exact terms. That there are no absolutely automatic mechanisms hardly needs pointing out. They all must be controlled by human power at one moment or another, and what is still more important, they are all products of human intelligence, and whatever forces there may be involved in their working, these forces are brought together by the action of human thought which, compressed and wound up like a spring, constitutes their actual prime-mover throughout the whole process of their working. The problem is thus reduced to the definition of that degree of independence from immediate human control and power which mechanism, as such, can possess. This, however, is so indeterminate that we see similar kinds of action, in one case styled mechanical,

and in another case highly individual. Who will doubt, for instance, that the action of an organ played at a concert is individual, and that of a locomotive engine mechanical? (I pass over the controversial question of the piano-player). And yet it cannot be disputed that the second requires as much skill and personal control as the first. Let it be noted, the point of the argument is not whether their work is art or not art, but whether it is mechanical or non-mechanical. I maintain that there is no real distinction between the one and the other, and that both can be made to serve artistic ends if properly used.

One more example of the prevailing confusion of thought on this subject. The gramophone is admittedly a mechanical contrivance. So is the telephone. Yet no one, listening through the telephone to an opera, ever says that the music one hears is a mechanical production. The sole difference, however, that exists between this music and its record on the gramophone, is that the gramophone fixes only

one stage of the process—the vibrations of the membrane—and allows one at will to “switch on,” so to speak, the flow of sound, whilst the telephone receives and transmits the sound in one continuous process.

The above two examples show not only how vague is the popular use of the term “mechanical,” but reveal also the elements that go to make up the significance of this term. These elements are: (1) complexity of mechanism, (2) the number of intermediate stages, and (3) the period of time between the application of human power and the appearance of the effect. It is only necessary to rid the mind of prejudice for a moment, to be able to see that not a single one of these elements is in any way incompatible with artistic work and achievement. And if at the present time mechanical methods of production under our commercial system have served to destroy whatever artistic feeling there has been in the producer, this speaks not against the mechanical method as such, but against the way it is used in our time.

Now let us examine the problem itself. Let us first endeavour to realize what is the peculiar nature of the kinema-drama, and then we shall be able to see how far this "mechanical" medium lends itself to artistic expression.

Perhaps it is one of the most startling facts about the kinematograph productions that the actors who, at the present time, play for the pictures are all members of the legitimate dramatic profession. Their attainments on the theatre stage need not be discussed in this instance, but it stands beyond dispute that of kinema-acting they understand very little indeed. The kinema-drama raises some of the most fundamental problems of art. But what do they know of them? Are they aware that the kinematograph play is the most abstract form of the pantomime? Do they realize that if there is any stage on which the laws of movement should reign supreme, it is the kinematograph stage? If they did, they would not have monopolized the kinematograph play, but would have left it to the

dancers, clowns, and acrobats who do know something about the laws of movement. By no means do I presume that dancers and clowns are necessarily artists. But movement is their natural element, and it is also movement that constitutes the real nature of the kinematograph. The patrons and devotees of present-day pictures may boast of their "wonderful realistic effects," but this popular conception only betrays the complete failure to grasp this one salient fact, that viewed from the standpoint of the drama, just as from many other standpoints of which more will be said later on, the kinematograph is essentially and pre-eminently dynamic.

It is necessary at this point to realize the effect of picture-plays if this principle of pure movement was recognized throughout. "Rolling eyes" and wild gesticulation would be abolished. Sham "natural" talking would give place to mimicry and gesture, free and eloquent. Movement of actors would no longer imitate actual life but would synthetically express it in the

peculiar laws of rhythmic motion. Pantomimes, harlequinades, and ballets would take the place of the present-day melodramas and comical pictures, thus giving an adequate expression to the wordless nature of the medium. Would it be possible, then, to argue that there is no art in the kinematograph? So far as the dramatic aspect is concerned this, at any rate, would constitute a most decisive step in the direction of art. And other advances would immediately follow once the fundamental principle was firmly established.

It is often contended that the presence in bodily form of the actor in the play is the *sine-qua-non* of artistic drama. This view is held both by those who believe in realism on the stage and by those who do not. The attitude of the latter is particularly droll. After disposing of all the realistic mummary, they cling to the last citadel of "the true to nature" gospel of art—the bodily shell of the actor. Why, is it not his personality that really matters? And is that expressed only in the frail body of the actor? To the

spectator of some artistic culture it is in a sense irrelevant whether the acting on the stage is performed by living persons, by dolls, or by kinematograph shadows. The effect in each case must necessarily be different, but only in so far as the artistic properties of each of these media of drama differ from each other. Their absolute artistic value remains unaffected by their being animate or inanimate. In fact, it is open to argument, whether man is at all suitable as a medium of dramatic art—as is the contention of Mr Gordon Craig and others. But we need not go so far. In the case of kinema-drama we do not dispense with the actor. We dispense only with his body. Perhaps those who cannot reconcile themselves to this fact will find comfort in reflecting upon the time when poets were gradually led to recognize that singing a poem in person is not the only way of rendering the artistic beauties of the composition. In our age of reduplication, to the list of arts which already resort to this process (poetry, music, lithography,

etching) we now add the sacred art of the theatre. It is a process of natural development, and it would be sheer stupidity on our part if we continued to ignore it or to notice only its outward features. Just as it did not degrade the profession of the painter when he realized the artistic possibilities of lithography, so it will not degrade the modern actor if he makes full use of the new medium which human ingenuity has placed at his command. The real and the only problem for him is to find out what actually constitutes the peculiar properties of the medium, and how these properties should be managed to achieve the highest artistic effect. The fact that the problem can be solved only by practice and experiment, and that present-day kinematograph practice has produced, in the artistic sense, some most appalling results, must not be taken as proof of the inartistic nature of the medium itself. The truth of this statement has been shown above as applied to the playing of actors. It will be seen that it is equally

true applied to the pictorial element of stage production.

The peculiar optical effects of the kinematograph are a resultant of two processes : the photographic process of making the film, and the process of projecting the film on to the screen.

What artistic possibilities do these processes possess ?

There is no need to enter, in this instance, upon a discussion of photography as art. Its shortcomings as a medium and the triteness of the average photographic work can hardly be disputed. But only prejudice can deny it any artistic quality whatever. The magnificent work so often found at various photographic exhibitions proves beyond doubt that photography and art are not so incompatible as some of our purists would like us to believe.

The same is the case with kinematography. So long as it remains in the hands of mere operators and chemists, so long will its pictorial value be on a par with the artistic conceptions held by

these craftsmen. And this can hardly be wondered at, seeing that the nature of the new medium, to be properly understood, requires such a culture of mind as is seldom met with even amongst professional exponents of art.

The problem presented is no less than that of determining the exact degree of significance attaching to the various dramatic and pictorial forms of the medium.

At the outset there must be stated one important fact. The kinematograph has at its command two distinct ways of producing plays: the two-dimensional production on the ordinary screen, and the three-dimensional production by means of different stereoscopic devices and of the kineplastikon. Too much stress cannot be laid upon this distinction. Its importance is enormous since in the two forms of space—of two and of three dimensions—we obtain two aspects of the world which are opposed to each other in their very elements.

Without repeating the arguments discussed elsewhere in this volume, I will

only state that the setting on the stage may either emphasize the reality and independence of the world portrayed, or it may suggest its unity with the spectator. It achieves the first effect by enclosing the action within the architectural boundaries of the stage and by creating the perception of figures and objects isolated in space. It achieves the second effect by destroying the opposition of the architectural forms of the stage and the amphitheatre, and by drowning the forms of objects in the visual continuity that tends towards the perception of a single plane.

With certain qualifications, the same principles obtain in the kinematograph, determining its dramatic and pictorial presentment. Compared with the legitimate stage or painting on flat surfaces, the command of space possessed by the kinematograph is infinitely greater than theirs. As it is able to discriminate between the different methods of pictorial presentation, it is certainly obliged to do so. Unlike the others, it can afford to be logical. Its

pictures on the ordinary screen are already as flat as paintings. But it would only gain in effect, and would reveal the inner monistic nature of the two-dimensional space, if it were more consistent and eliminated every atom of natural relief. Play of lines and colours is all that is required on the flat screen, and if properties of the medium have, as everybody believes nowadays, any importance in the achievement of artistic effect, then it is obvious that the kinematograph can only gain by consistent application of flat setting to pictures on the ordinary screen.

On the other hand, to represent the world as distinct from the spectator and individualized within itself, the method of three-dimensional staging affords both the actor and the pictorial artist an unlimited scope for new and altogether original artistic achievements.

The stagings of Mr Gordon Craig, for instance, unfetter and expand the stage. They are not theatrical in the narrow sense of the word. They purport to create on the

boards a world of their own—one entirely distinct from the stage world, however far, at the same time, it may be removed from the realistic. But the stage is only a stage, and the space on it has its well-known limitations. The case with the stereoscopic kinematograph is different. Its command of space is practically boundless. It *can* create another world and place it before the eyes of the audience that they may *watch it* with admiration, sympathy, or disdain. The stereoscopic kinematograph, in the hands of real artists, could raise even realistic drama (in its worldless form, of course) to its proper position as representing the world objectively stated and *watched from outside*.

As to the pictorial artist, both the plane and the stereoscopic moving picture open before him a new field for artistic development. It would be impossible at the present stage of the kinematograph to discuss in detail the multifarious problems arising out of the application of this new process. Only practical experience could

give satisfactory answers to many of the questions. But there are some general features of the kinema-pictorial process, which already allow of analysis and discussion.

The most important of them is the dynamic character of the kinematograph. In addition to the third dimension, which the kinematograph provides by stereoscopic projection, it possesses yet another co-ordinate—time. How does this element enter into the pictorial and plastic arts? We know the Egyptians answered this question by discarding the notion itself. Instead of transient time they imparted to their immovable, frigid productions a spirit of eternity. The Greek, the Renaissance, and most modern artists tried to give the impression of movement by arranging the elements of a picture or a statue in such a way that the eye had to travel over the production and, by following the contortions of the muscles of a moving animal or man, gained the desired impression. A further, though hardly successful, step

was made by Picasso and other cubists. Instead of attempting *representation* of movement, they simply assumed that the longer it takes you to disentangle their re-buses, the greater is the impression of time. And so it really is, for boredom increases in the geometrical progression. Lastly, we have the most wonderful solution which the futurists give us. Time, they would give us to understand, is just like an opera-hat. Squeeze it into one moment, as you squeeze the hat by inadvertently sitting on it, and everything will come right. They call this "fluency of the body," or "viewing the world under the aspect of the fourth dimension," which, whatever else can be said of it, sounds at least very impressive.

Now the kinematograph is the first medium by which one can deal with time squarely and fairly without recourse to such tricks (however "square" they may be) as the cubist or futurist make use of. Is that not in itself a sufficient reason why artists should at once take up this unique opportunity?

Thus, following the distinction stated above, we shall have two branches of this mobile art: the flat screen kinematograph—the realm of the flat-surface artist, and the stereoscopic kinematograph, the realm of the sculptor—the thinker in form and *colour*. At present, the only indications of this future mobile art are found in the best theatrical productions, such, for instance, as the exquisite stagings of the Russian ballets by Bakst, Anisfeld, Golovin, and their designs for costumes in particular, since in the varying combinations of lines and colours on the background of the scenery there lies the basis of the mobile art.

It is necessary at this point and in the light of the foregoing opinions to consider what position the artist will occupy in future kinematograph productions. In the stereoscopic kinematograph he already has at his command nearly all he can desire. It is true, the life-colours are yet wanting, but an artist can obtain a real colour-tone from black and white. Also he can tone

the film just as he pleases, so that after all he is not entirely deprived of colour. Otherwise the stereoscopic kinema-photography leaves hardly anything to be desired. It gives a facsimile reproduction, colour excepted, of the actual scene. If, then, the legitimate stage affords scope for the application of artistic talent, the stereoscopic kinematograph has the additional advantage of a much greater command of space than the stage.

The problems of photography in the one-plane kinematograph are somewhat different. They are akin to those met with in other arts dealing with the flat surface; on the other hand, they are naturally distinguished from them in so far as they all depend on the mobile conditions of the kinematograph. The influence of these conditions on other artistic effects can be judged from the fact that in moving pictures we are seldom able to fix our attention on one given position for any considerable length of time. This being so, the criteria of art applied to the moving

pictures must be obviously different from those applied, say, to paintings or prints. The laws of composition, for instance, can not possibly be the same as in the latter cases. What they are I will not here attempt to define, but an artist who took up the kinematograph would find that such laws do exist and, gradually, by experiment and practice, he would subject them to his control. At present, our ideas on mobile composition are so undeveloped and so crude, that posterity will hardly be able to believe that they could ever have obtained. It is only necessary to remind ourselves of the revolution started in this field by Jacque Dalcroze with his rythmic gymnastics. It is still open to an artist to give it a worthy counterpart in fixing it on the film.

In this connection the attempts made by Mr A. Wallace Rimington in England, and M. Scriabin, the well-known composer, in Russia, to create a new art of colour-music, are of interest. Mr Rimington has already given us a detailed exposition of

his theory, and a description of the colour organ, the instrument he specially invented for this purpose. As to Scriabin's achievements, unfortunately death has put an untimely end to his experiments, and thus we have been deprived of detailed information concerning the actual results obtained. However, there can be little doubt that this new form of art will have a great future, and that in one way or another it will become one of the most essential components of the artistic kinematograph.

The second kinema-photographic problem is akin to the question of ordinary photographic prints. Line drawing being excluded by the nature of photography as we at present know it, the problem is how to achieve the best results with a medium similar in character to the wash. The problem lies not so much with the lighting of models as with the production of the film and projection on the screen. Greater artistic effect would, probably, be achieved on a screen of more solid consistency than those now in vogue, and having a grained

surface, such, for instance, as would be provided by a white plastered wall. Next, the lights and shades on the film should also give more concentrated, solid, and flat masses, thus obviating unnecessary details, often so annoyingly conspicuous. The silhouette picture-film, a method of treatment, little popular with the modern kinematograph, but possessing wonderful possibilities, should be mentioned in this connection. For fairy-tales, grotesque and sentimental stories, hardly anything could be better suited.

In conclusion, let me recapitulate the principal points. The artistic failure of the modern kinematograph is due solely to lack of understanding of the peculiar properties of this medium. The latter is dynamic throughout. Expression of the rhythmically moving body must be the only law of the actor, expression of the rhythmically moving form and colour the only law of the pictorial artist.

The actor must cease ignoring the dumb nature of the kinematograph in performing

“realistic” plays. Pantomime and ballet are the only forms open to him. He can achieve greatly varying psychological effects by staging his plays in two or three dimensions. The silhouette is the form of acting where the one plane principle of staging finds its complete expression.

The pictorial artist must discriminate between the flat-screen and the stereoscopic cinematograph-projection. With the first he must try to eliminate all relief, to evolve the colour value of black and white, and to make the screen as good an artistic medium as that provided by paper. With the second, he must solve the complicated problem of planes and volumes which this stereoscopic form of projection places before him. In application to both methods he must evolve the formulæ of mobile composition and mobile colour.

So much for the actor and the artist.

Above all, however, the cinematograph needs men of genius, of deep insight and great spiritual culture. More than the theatre, it is a synthetic form of art, as both

the dramatic and the pictorial arts constitute the basic elements of its nature. To be raised from its present state of degradation it requires men, who would combine in themselves the talent for dramatic and pictorial presentation with the wisdom of sages and seers. It requires that clear-consciousness without which there is no real personality and no individual perception of the world.

Art being the revelation of the human spirit in everything capable of expressing it, the only condition with which it must of necessity comply, is the use of the medium in accordance with its nature. So the kinematograph will rise to the level of art when men of great intelligence and insight express themselves in forms determined by the natural properties of this new medium. Everything seems to indicate that we shall not have long to wait.

INDEX

A

Alexandrinsky Theatre, The (of Petrograd), 21, 39, 55, 67, 68
 Alexeyev (Stanislavsky), 23, 25
 Alexis Mikhailovich, Tsar, 6-8
A Month in the Country, 44
 Andreyev, Leonid, 45, 212
 Anisfeld, 233
 Artem, 25
At the Gates of the Kingdom, 45

B

Bakst, 233
 Bat, The (of Moscow), 83
 Benois, Alexander, 85-86
 Block, Alexander, 74, 75
Blue Bird, The, 45
Boris Godunov, 17

C

Carrier Henschel, The, 35
 Chekhov, Anton, 17, 29, 38-43, 186
Cherry Orchard, The, 40
 Commedia dell' arte, 72, 73, 74
Cog d'Or, Le, 4, 85, 86
 Craig, Gordon, 52, 53, 189-191, 197, 201-206, 224, 229
 Cronegk, 34

D

Dalcroze, xxiii, 235
 D'Annunzio, Gabriel, 212
 Davidov, 21
Death of Ivan the Terrible, The, 17
 Delsarte, xxiii
 Diderot, 19

Q

Distorted Mirror, The (of Petrograd), 83
 Dmitrevsky, Ivan, 10, 11, 12
 Dobuzhinsky, 44
Don Juan, 76
 Dostoyevsky, 105

E

Elizabethan Theatre, 161-166, 167, 196
 Elizabeth, Tsarina, 10
 Ermolov, Mme, 21
 Euclid, 124
 Evreinov, N., 77-82, 93, 169, 177-178, 188, 197

F

Fedotov, Mme, 21
 Fokin, 83, 84
Fruits of Culture, The, 16
 Fuchs, Georg, 66
 Furttenbach, Joseph, 191

G

Garrick, David, 12
Getting Married, 14
 Gogol, 13, 14, 15
 Golovin, 233
 Greek Theatre, 65, 69, 87, 88, 90, 143-158, 167, 172-174, 196
 Gregori, 7, 8
 Griboyedov, 13, 14, 15

H

Haig, A. E., 150
Hamlet, 53
 Hamsun, Knut, 45

Hannele, 28
 Hebdon, John, 6
 Helmholtz, 126, 133
 Hauptmann, 28, 35
 House of Intermediæ, The (of Petrograd), 82

I

Ibsen, 44, 55
Inspector-General, The, 14, 187
 Italian Theatre, 72, 73, 74, 166, 168, 191
Ivanov, 39
 Ivanov, Viacheslav, 64, 101-120

J

Julius Cæsar, 35

K

Kachalov, 51
 Karatigin, 19
 Knipper, Mme, 25
 Kommissarzhevsky, Vera, 39, 54-56
Krechinsky's Marriage, 16

L

Lensky, 21
Life of Man, The, 45
 Lulin, Mme, 25
Little Booth, The, 74, 75
Live Corpse, The, 16
 Lobachevsky, 125
 Luzhsky, 25

M

Maeterlinck, M., 45, 61, 62, 63, 65, 69, 197
 Marlow, 8
Master Builder, The, 55
 Mediæval Theatre, 72, 158-161, 167, 180-184, 196
 Meiningen Company, 34
Merchant of Venice, The, 28
 Merezhkovsky, 106

Merry Theatre, The (of Petrograd), 82
 Meyerhold, Vsevolod, xxi, 25, 46, 55-76, 77, 82, 83, 84, 93-94, 169-171, 188, 189, 197
Miracle, The, xxiii, 172
 Mochalov, 19
 Molière, 16, 73, 76
 Moscow Art Theatre, The, 4, 17, 22, 23-53, 56, 57, 58, 79, 88, 92, 184-187, 197, 204
 Moscow Imperial Dramatic Theatre, The, 20, 21
 Moskvín, 25, 51

N

Nemirovich-Danchenko, Vladimir, 23, 25, 26, 38, 56
 Nietzsche, 103, 104, 113

O

Œdipus Rex, 172
 Old-Time Theatre, The (of Petrograd), 82
 Ostrovsky, 13, 15

P

Peter the Great, 9
 Philharmonic School, The (of Moscow), 24
 Picasso, 232
 Poulsen, Anna, 7
Power of Darkness, The, 16
Price of Life, The, 38
 Pushkin, 17
 Pythagoras, 126

R

Reinhardt, Max, xxiii, 66, 169, 171-177, 188, 189, 197
 Riman, 125
 Rimington, Wallace, xxi, 235
 Rimsky-Korsakov, 85
 Roman Theatre, 87, 91, 179-180
 Rozanov, 106

S

Sanin, 25
 Savin, Mme, 21
 Savitsky, Mme, 25
 Schepkin, 19, 20, 47
 Scriabin, xxi, 235, 236
Sea-gull, The, 29, 39
 Serlio, 191
 Sezanne, 214
 Shakespeare, 73
 Society of Art and Literature,
 The (of Moscow), 23, 24, 25
 Sologub, Fyodor, 64
 Soloviev, Vladimir, 105
Sorrow from Wisdom, The, 14
 Stanislavsky, Constantine (Alex-
 eyev), 23, 25, 26, 39, 47, 50,
 52, 53, 56, 57
 Studio Theatre, The (of Mos-
 cow), 57
 Sukhovo-Kobelin, 16
Sunken Bell, The, 28

T

Talma, 19
Tamburlaine, 8
 Theatre of Musical Drama, The
 (of Petrograd), 88
Three Sisters, The, 40
 Tolstoy, Alexis, 16, 17, 27
 Tolstoy, Leo, 16, 105
Tsar Boris, 17
Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich, 17, 27,
 29
 Turgenev, 16, 17, 44

U

Uncle Vania, 39

V

Van-Goch, 214
 Varlamov, 21
 Velten, 7
 Volkov, Fyodor, 10, 11

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